POVERTY AND POWER: SURVIVAL OF THE POOREST IN THREE VILLAGES OF WEST BENGAL, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the relation between power and poor people's agency. It does so through critical review of the literature on theories of poverty, and through a comparative analysis of three villages in two contrasting regions of West Bengal, India.

Chapters two and three compare two theoretical approaches to poverty. Chapter two notes the connection between the ideology of poverty measurement in nineteenth century Britain and twentieth century India, and discusses mainstream literature on the Indian political economy which concentrates on the poor. The chapter locates a common theme in these two literatures, which are seen to conceptualise the poor as passive and lacking agency. Chapter three considers an alternative theoretical approach, that is literature concerning the dimension of human agency. In particular it analyses the tradition of 'people's history', which conceptualizes the poor as active participants in the making of their societies, as well as contemporary discussion of poor people's participation in rural development.

Chapter four gives a background to agrarian West Bengal in terms of history, agro-ecology, agrarian differentiation and politics. Chapter five describes the two study regions, the three study villages, and the methodology used in the field. It also outlines the method of categorization of village households employed in the thesis.

The next two chapters present the field work data. Chapter six evaluates the effectiveness of irrigation facilities introduced into the main study village as a means of examining how external resources are mediated through village power structure. The evaluation analyses the relation between irrigation, the local agro-ecology, and power structure. The main benefits of the programme accrued to the village elite, and benefits to the poor were negligible.

Chapter seven focusses on poverty as experienced by the poorest, and poorest people's priorities. In contrast to chapter six, it details indigenous efforts at 'development'. It discusses five types of strategies used by sixty purposively selected poorest households that were crucial to their survival: use of common property resources, management of food, sharerearing of livestock, sale of assets, and informal organization into mutual support networks. Poorest people exploited both social and natural resource bases in an attempt to 'negotiate' a better quality of life for themselves within local socio-economic structures.

The conclusion stresses the importance of understanding the ways in which the abilities of the poor are conceptualised, and argues that rural development may be more successful if it attempts to understand and build on indigenous strategies already in use by the poor.

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Glossary

Adibhashi	Tribal (literally: indigenous dweller)
Aman	The late monsoon agricultural season, or paddy grown in that season
Aus	The early monsoon agricultural season, or paddy grown in that season
Bargadar	Sharecropper
Basta	60 kgs. (literally: a sack)
Boro	The dry agricultural season, or paddy grown in that season
Bhadoi	The early monsoon season
Bhadralok	Gentleman
Bigha	Measure of land, equivalent to 0.33 decimals in 24 Parganas District, and 0.62 decimals in Midnapore District
Dacoit	Robber, bandit
Dadan	Agricultural contract system where credit is repaid with labour
Danga/ Dahi	High, usually poor quality land
Dhan	Paddy
Dheki	Machine for dehusking rice
Dhoti	Men's garment
Goondah	Criminal, usually belonging to a gang
Hat	Measure, about 45 cms.
Jhinghe	*Luffa acuntangula*
Jotedar	Rich peasant, and/or rent receiver
Kaccha	Made of natural materials; poorly made (literally: unripe)
Kaloo	Black
Kattah	Land measure, equal to one twentieth of a *bigha*
Khas	Land vested in the government under a land reform programme
Khathah	Sown quilt
Lal	Red
Lathial	Henchman of *zamindar*
Maund	Weight, equivalent to 40 kgs.
Mouza	Village level administrative boundary, roughly equivalent to one village and the fields and land associated with it
Panchayat	Village level government body
Panchayat Samiti	Block level government body
Par Routi	Leavened bread
Para	Sub-section of a village
Prahdhan	Leader
Purdah	System of seclusion of women (literally: curtain)
Robi	The dry agricultural season
Sal	*Shorea robusta*
Sali	Lower lying paddy land
Shottuck	Land measure, equivalent to one decimal
Zamindar	Traditional rent collectors in Bengal, made into landlords by the British Permanent Settlement
Zilla Parishad	District Level government body

Acronyms

BFTW	Bread for the World
CPM	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPR	Common Property Resource
DRDA	District Rural Development Authority
HYV	High Yielding Variety
IRDP	Integrated Rural Development Programme
MV	Modern Variety
NSS	National Sample Survey
RDC	Rural Development Consortium, Calcutta
STW	Shallow Tube Well
USKS	*Udayan Samaj Kalyan Samity*
WBEAA	West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act

CHAPTER ONE
Introduction

This thesis has three themes. The first is to examine survival strategies and abilities of 60 poorest households in three villages of two contrasting agro-ecological regions of West Bengal, India; and the interaction of the poorest with local socio-economic structure. The second is to compare indigenous and external forms of rural development. The third is to investigate how poverty is interpreted, and the relation between how the characteristics of the poor people are conceptualised, and policy formation.

Chapter two examines the development of poverty measurement, tracing its origins to nineteenth century Britain, and the influence of this British heritage on the way that poverty is measured and the poor are conceptualised in India. The narrowness of the dominant contemporary statistical paradigm in India is questioned. Some broader attempts to understand and theorize poverty are then considered. The chapter goes on to consider the work of 'political economists' writing about the poor in India, and the relation between their writing and poverty measurement. In almost all cases the writers discussed in this chapter take a view of the poor as passive recipients of external influence, and this determines to a large extent their policy agenda.

The tradition discussed in chapter two is contrasted with a radically different literature in chapter three. This literature has conceptualised the poor as active participants in the making of their societies, but in doing so has tended to underplay the importance of socio-economic structures with which the poor must interact. Chapter three analyses the work of British Marxist historians, and in particular E.P. Thompson, paying close attention to Thompson's concepts of agency and experience, as well as to moral economy theory. Lastly, the chapter examines contemporary development literature that has focussed on the importance of understanding poor people's priorities and knowledge. It is the literature discussed in chapter three that has given theoretical direction to this thesis. The discussion in chapters two and three suggests that both the abilities of the poor, as well as contextualizing socio-economic structures, typologized as human agency and structure respectively, need to be considered if poverty is to be understood. The necessity of considering the interaction of agency and structure in the study of poverty is stressed throughout the thesis.

The next three chapters analyse socio-economic structures at regional and village level. Chapter four provides a background to the case study area, the moribund delta of West Bengal, in terms of history, agro-ecology, socio-economy and politics. The chapter also describes the two contrasting agro-ecological districts covered, 24 Parganas and

Midnapore. Structural features of the rural economy, including tenancy, land ownership, and control of resources by a small rural elite, are outlined.

Chapter five describes the relation between methodology, theory and choice of subject matter, and the means of data collection. It also provides a background to the three case study villages, noting how structural features at regional level are mirrored in individual villages. Lastly, it sets out the method used in categorizing village households.

Chapter six examines the rural economies of the study villages by evaluating two rural development programmes. In the main study village in 24 Parganas District, an irrigation scheme, funded by the Government of West Bengal, is assessed over three seasons to discover its effects on village socio-economic structures and on the poor at whom it was originally targetted. This allows a contribution to an ongoing debate on the equity effects of the 'green revolution' in India. In the secondary study villages in Midnapore District the government land reform programme is evaluated. Both of these programmes are seen to re-inforce existing socio-economic structures.

Having analysed socio-economic structure, chapter seven moves to the survival strategies and abilities of 60 poorest households from the three study villages, drawing its theoretical direction from the literature discussed in chapter three. In contrast to the type of rural development examined in chapter six, which considered the male sphere of influence, in chapter seven the form of 'development' considered is indigenous, an 'informal economy' run mainly by women. In particular, the chapter discusses the use by the poorest of the natural and social resource bases - common property resources, assets and support networks - and the means by which the poorest negotiate for themselves a better quality of life within village society. It concentrates on the view point and priorities of the poorest, and also considers their views of the elite in their villages.

A wide ranging review of micro-level village studies in India by B. Harriss (1987) has shown that little of this literature concentrates specifically on poverty. Even less attention, as Breman (1985b) has remarked, has been given to the perspectives of the poor. The data presented in this thesis can thus be considered as both original, and as contributing to an area where relatively little is known. Equally, theoretical debates on poverty and the poor have tended to be ahistorical and unfocussed, and the following discussion of poverty measurement will attempt to clarify the nature of poverty, and debates about its meaning.

CHAPTER TWO
Measures of the poor and the measurement of poverty

2.1 Introduction

This chapter and chapter three review relevant literature on poverty. This chapter focusses on how poverty has been measured and explained, and relates this to the way that the characteristics of the poor have been conceptualised, and solutions to poverty formulated. Measurement of poverty is not easily separated from explanations of the causes of poverty, and the two will be discussed together throughout this chapter.

Poverty has been defined and explained in various ways. One of the most important contemporary methods of defining poverty in India has been through its measurement. Section 2.2 examines how methods of poverty measurement originated in nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain, and how authors on poverty measurement drew on contemporary views of the poor in developing these methods. It is argued that the view taken of the poor in this literature is integrally connected to regulatory policy for dealing with poverty.

Measurement of poverty as developed in Britain has been a central influence on poverty measurement in India. Section 2.3 shows that the methods of measuring poverty in contemporary India, and the preoccupations of the measurers, remain those of the originators of the poverty line in Britain. The 'logic' of the use of the poverty line, and the concomitant view that this assumes of the poor, are analysed. The relation between poverty measurement and the cause of poverty, or its explanation, is also discussed.

In section 2.4 attempts to develop broader measures and definitions of poverty are reviewed, and the complex nature of 'absolute' and 'relative' approaches to poverty outlined. In section 2.5 the work of selected contemporary political economists writing on India is discussed with reference to their conceptualisation of the characteristics of the poor, and the state. The connection of this literature to that on poverty measurement is also examined.

This chapter discusses the work of authors who have been concerned with quantification and measurement as a means of defining poverty, and in whose work the poor tend to be considered as passive and apolitical, but subject to irrational and

dangerous behaviour. This literature is therefore seen to deny agency to the poor.[1] The chapter presents original material in that the connection between the methods of poverty measurement, and the social and political preoccupations of those first using poverty lines in Britain and contemporary practitioners in India, has not been previously pointed out. Also, the paradigmatic basis of poverty measurement and the view this assumes of the poor have not in the past been adequately examined. An understanding of the history and political nature of poverty measurement makes it clear that mainstream debates concerning poverty conducted in India today operate within a sterile statistical paradigm.

2.2 Poverty measurement in Britain

2.2.1 The history of poverty measurement in Britain

The concept of 'absolute' poverty, now prevalent in India, is usually traced back to the work of Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree (see e.g. Sen 1982: 11-12; Townsend 1979: 33-34). The concept of absolute poverty can be equated with the 'head count' measure; that is, it involves the formation of a 'poverty line' by setting a minimum level of subsistence needed by an individual or household. The number counted below this subsistence level are said to be in poverty (hence the term 'head count'). Absolute poverty is usually contrasted to 'relative' poverty (Townsend 1979).

Absolute and relative poverty are further discussed in section 2.4. The purpose of this section is to examine the origins of and background to measurement of absolute poverty, and the heritage of Booth and Rowntree. I will discuss the nineteenth century tradition of debates on poverty on which these two men drew, and in doing so exploit the various meanings of 'measure'. Measure can mean: 'to form an opinion or opinions.... to weigh or gauge the abilities or character of (a person), with a view to what one is to expect from him.' Measure also means 'to estimate the amount, duration, value, etc of (an immaterial thing) by comparison with some standard'; and also, in a now rare sense, 'to regulate, moderate, restrain.'[2] This section will show that, with regards to poverty, measure in its normal usage - that is, 'to estimate the amount', cannot be separated from the other two meanings given above, concerning character and regulation. In examining the interaction of these three meanings of measure, this section points to underlying features of the poverty measurement paradigm, and the view this maintains of those being measured.

Contemporary views of the poor informed poverty measurement when it first became a 'science' at the end of the nineteenth century in Britain. One set of views stemmed

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[1]Throughout this thesis I employ the terms 'agency' and 'structure', which have been widely used in geographical and other theoretical debates concerning social process. For reasons of coherence, the literature on agency and structure is discussed in chapter three.
[2]Source for these definitions is the 1989 edition of the Oxford English Dictionary.

from the nature of nineteenth century British society. As Hobsbawm put it (1975: 219): 'Inequality of life and expectation was built into the system.' The 'bourgeois' view of society was thus: 'Since success was due to personal merit, failure was due to personal lack of merit. The traditional bourgeois ethic, puritan or secular, had ascribed this to moral or spiritual feebleness rather than lack of intellect....' (ibid.: 246).

Much of the work of authors on poverty in Britain in the nineteenth century embraced this 'bourgeois' ethic. Their 'opinions' were sensitive to the sufferings of the poor, but they also took a stance of moral superiority. Frederick Eden, who provided 'parochial reports' on the state of the poor from parishes throughout Britain in the 1790's, presented a view that was the forerunner to many others, and typical of one way the rich thought about the poor in the nineteenth century (1928: 100):

> There seems to be just reason to conclude that the miseries of the labouring Poor arose less from the scantiness of their income (however much the philanthropist might wish it to be increased) than from their own improvidence and unthriftiness....

Eden makes a connection between poverty and morality ('improvidence and unthriftiness') that was to be made again and again throughout the nineteenth century (see e.g. Thompson 1986: 394-5, 409). Associated with this view of the poor as improvident came a criticism of their unwise eating habits (Eden 1928: 106):

> The aversion to broths and soups composed of barley meal or oatmeal is in many parts of the South almost insuperable. Instances occurred during last winter (1794) when the poor were extremely distressed by the high price of provision; of their rejecting soup which was served at a gentleman's table.[3]

The 'general ignorance of the poor in cooking', to quote the title of one of the chapters of Alexis Soyer's cookery book *A shilling cookery for the people* (Soyer 1855), remained a common theme into the early twentieth century. This is of particular relevance as nutrition and poverty measurement are closely linked, and food and its production is one central theme of this thesis. The poor were considered ignorant not only in cooking but also in most other areas of their lives (see Mennell 1985: 227; and Snell 1985: 5-9 on the nineteenth century rural labourer).[4]

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[3]See also Thompson (1986: 347-351) and the Hammonds (1948: 119) on the element of social control involved in attempts to make changes in the diets of the poor at the beginning of the nineteenth century

[4]Various bodies proselytised improved eating habits for the poor. Two of these were the Universal Cookery and Food Association (Cookery Annual 1908: 121), and the influential Charity Organisation Society (Bosanquet 1898; Dendy 1895).

The report of the House of Commons Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration of 1904 illustrates this view. The Committee was set up to examine the poor physical status of recruits for the army intended for the war in South Africa. The ability of the state to maintain a fighting force to protect colonial interests depended on the physical status of the poor, which in turn rested on what and how the poor ate. Here is the contemporary view of the poor (Inter-Departmental Committee 1904: 15):

> .... in large classes of the community there has not been developed a desire for improvement commensurate with the opportunities offered to them. Laziness, want of thrift, ignorance of household management, and particularly to the choice and preparation of food, filth, indifference to parental obligations, drunkeness, infect adults of both sexes, and press with terrible severity on their offspring.

Such views of the poor in nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain were part of a larger argument about the responsibility of the state for poverty (Himmelfarb 1985; Lis and Soly 1979: 194-5). The *Economist's* reply to Mayhew's 'Morning Chronicle' articles, which described the lifestyles of the poor in London in the 184O's, makes this clear (Mayhew 1971: 26):

> The people can only help themselves. ....Their fate is given into their own hands; they are responsible for their condition; the rich are no more responsible for their condition than they are responsible for the condition of the rich....

If the poor were irresponsible in matters such as eating then the causes of poverty lay with them, and not with the social structure or the 'rich'; hence the concentration on the wrong choice of food by the poor. Solutions to poverty were therefore to be found in educating the ignorant poor as to how to manage their households. Alternative views of the poor and the causes of poverty, based on the works of Adam Smith, Tom Paine, William Cobbett and others were also prevalent in the nineteenth century, but the view of the poor as irresponsible remained dominant, and was a major influence on the formation of poverty measurement (a detailed discussion of concepts of poverty in the first half of the nineteenth century in Britain can be found in Himmelfarb 1985).

Original 'measures' of poverty, or estimates of poor people's characters, were also therefore concerned with deciding responsibility for poverty. This led as the nineteenth century progressed to more sophisticated divisions among groups of the poor, into separate but not clearly distinct groups. As was common for the time,[5] Mayhew divided

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[5]See Thompson (1986: 439); Schaffer (1985: 42-3); Lis and Soly (1979:195); Hobsbawm (1975: 224-229); and for a detailed discussion Himmelfarb (1985). For similar divisions

the poor into those who would and would not work - or the moral and immoral poor. This supported the notion that at least a section of the poor were irresponsible and unwilling to improve themselves, and therefore 'responsible' for their poverty. But it also suggested that some of the poor were 'moral' and willing to work (Mayhew 1971:102). The responsible, moral poor were artisans, the stalwarts of the nineteenth century industrial system, and most likely to adopt the values of the middle classes, as opposed to the 'dangerous and ragged masses' who needed to be controlled. (Hobsbawm 1975: 224). As Himmelfarb has shown (1985: chapter six), the division between pauper and labouring poor established in law with the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 moved away from the eighteenth century definition of poverty which saw no such divisions.

2.2.2 Measurement and morality - Charles Booth and Joseph Rowntree

By the time poverty came to be measured at the end of the nineteenth century, therefore, divisions based on moral categories had already been made amongst the poor. Charles Booth continued and expanded this moral categorisation in his *Life and Labour of the People in London*, which examined poverty in the 1880's. This study covered 909,000 people in the East End of London, and was based on personal visits, School Board visitors records, and figures from the Poor Law statistics and the Charities Organization Society. A poverty line based on income was set, the first use of such a measure, and the sample subsequently divided into eight classes based on income - A to H - the first four of which were below the poverty line.

Each of the eight classes mentioned had its own characteristics. Class A led (Booth 1969: 11) :

> ....the life of savages, with vicissitudes of extreme hardship and occasional excess.... they render no useful service, they create no wealth: more often they destroy it. They degrade whatever they touch, and as individuals are perhaps incapable of improvement.

One moral rung up this ladder of poverty were class B , which included many who (ibid.: 13):

> ....from shiftlessness, helplessness or drink, are inevitably poor. The ideal of such persons is to work when they like.... They cannot stand the regularity and dulness of civilized existence....

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outside of Britain see Hunter on early twentieth century U.S.A. (1912: 2-5), and Hufton on late eighteenth century France (1974: 22, 114).

And so on, through the more respectable and self sufficient poor, classes C and D, to the upright and 'honourable' class F (ibid.: 19). Booth's classes thus essentially followed nineteenth century tradition in dividing the moral from the immoral poor, even though he also used a poverty line based on income.

Booth's methods of dividing the poor into economic and moral categories were followed by Rowntree in his survey of every working class household in York in 1899, and in his less well known book on country labouring families (Rowntree 1922, 1913). Rowntree extended the 'precision' of measurement by calculating a poverty line based upon the expense from contemporary scientific views of what constituted a minimum diet,[6] to which were added the cost of rent, clothing, fuel and household sundries. For the first time in Britain, then, poverty measurement was based on 'scientific' findings.

As noted above, Rowntree's 1901 study is claimed as a forerunner to absolute measures of poverty, However, measurement of subsistence was only one part of Rowntree's work (see Veit-Wilson 1986: 75-81). Following nineteenth century tradition, Rowntree divided the poor into two categories - 'primary' and 'secondary' poor. The number in primary poverty was decided on a head count basis (Rowntree 1922: 143). These were the 'respectable' poor, poor through no fault of their own. Those in secondary poverty, however, were (ibid.: xix):

> Families whose total earnings would be sufficient for the maintenance of merely physical efficiency were it not that some portion of them is absorbed by other expenditure, either useful or wasteful.

The numbers in secondary poverty were worked out using this method (ibid.: 148):

> The investigator, in the course of his house-to-house visitation, noted down the households where there were evidences of poverty, i.e. obvious want and squalor. Direct information was often obtained from neighbours, or from a member of the household concerned, to the effect that the father or mother was a heavy drinker.... Judging in this way, partly by appearance, and partly from information given, I have been able to arrive at a fair estimate of the total number living in 'secondary' poverty.

Rowntree was equivocal about the causes of secondary poverty, as the reference to 'useful or wasteful' expenditure above suggests, but he came down on the side of wasteful expenditure: '....drink, betting and gambling, the predominant factor being

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[6]An idea originally used by Rowntree's father in his co-authored book *The Temperance Problem and Social Reform* (Rowntree and Sherwell 1899), a standard Edwardian manual on temperance; see Williams (1981: 356-60).

drink. Ignorant housekeeping and other improvident expenditure' meant that many 'respectable families....have sunk to the low moral level of their neighbours' (ibid.: 176, 88). Nine point nine per cent of the sample were found to be in primary poverty, and 17.9% in secondary. Again following nineteenth century tradition, Rowntree also commented on the advantages that would accrue to the 'labouring classes' if 'they possessed greater knowledge of the relative value of food stuffs' (ibid.: 284). Education and moral uplift were therefore required to overcome secondary poverty. While developing a measure based on nutritional information, Rowntree's study therefore also used 'opinion' to determine his categories of poverty, and the secondary poor were considered responsible for their own poverty.[7]

2.2.3 Poverty measurement and regulation of the poor

So far measurement and explanations of poverty have been discussed. Integral to these explanations were suggestions for solutions to poverty, and the background and political nature of these are considered in this section.

Suggestions for solutions to poverty were rife throughout the nineteeth century in Britain (for examples, see Himmelfarb 1985). One theme that stretched throughout the century was the idea of labour camps and the regulation of movement of the poor. Jeremy Bentham, for example, developed a scheme for pauper management which involved the establishment of a National Charity Company (under Bentham's directorship), based on the model of the East India Company, that would have 'undivided authority' over the 'whole body of the burdensome poor', who would be housed in model prisons the architecture of which would allow visibility from a central point into all the cells (Himmelfarb 1985: 79). There were also more radical solutions. For example, one proposed solution to the 'problem' of prostitution among poor needlewomen revealed by Mayhew was the deportation of half a million women to the colonies, a policy supported by Gladstone, among others (Mayhew 1971).[8]

The idea of model prisons surfaced again in Booth's work when he discussed solutions to the problems of poverty. Booth's class A, while 'the ready materials for disorder when occasion serves' (Booth 1969: 11) were considered a disgrace but not a danger. But classes A and B together threatened to unsettle the social structure by

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[7]In his later studies of poverty in York, Rowntree (1941: vi, 461; 1951) abandoned the use of 'secondary poverty' as definition of 'obvious want and squalor' was no longer possible, or comparable to the situation of 1899, when his first study took place.

[8]For details of schemes of deportation intended for the nineteenth century agricultural labourer, see Snell (1985: 111-13). For discussion of the Poor Law of 1834 as a disciplinary measure, see Snell (1985: 121).

dragging down the respectable, self-sufficient poor to their own level (ibid.: xxix). Booth's remedy was thus:

> To bring class B under state regulation would be to control the springs of pauperism.... the Individualistic system breaks down as things are, and is invaded on every side by Socialistic innovations, but its hardy doctrines would have a far better chance in a society purged of those who cannot stand alone.... my idea is that these people should be allowed to live in families in industrial groups planted wherever land and building materials were cheap; being well housed, well fed, and well warmed, and employed from morning to night on work indoors or out, for themselves or on government account....Class A, no longer confounded with the "unemployed" would be gradually harried out of existence.

The enforced movement of a considerable portion of the population (class B made up 11% of Booth's sample, ibid.: 13) stemmed directly from Booth's moral divisions among the poor. The policy of regulation therefore proceeded from 'estimation' of the character of the poor. Identification of the poor allowed repulsion of 'Socialistic innovations' and also provided a means of exorcising the threat of 'Socialism and Revolution' - a constant preoccupation of those concerned with poverty and poverty measurement, as will be seen below.

Brown (1968 : 354) has pointed out that after the publication of Booth's *Life and Labour of the People in London* , 'a number of detailed plans were brought forward for the creation in Britain of a system of labour colonies', which were also discussed in the House of Commons Interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration (1904: 85), suggesting that Booth's thinking was representative of that of his time.

Rowntree also had wider social concerns than simply identifying the poor; he was also, as a politician and businessman, interested in Britain's trading place in the world. At the end of his first study of poverty in York, Rowntree expresses his feelings on commercial Britain (Rowntree 1922: 261-2):

> In the commercial world things are not as they were. Other nations have been moving up to our own standards of efficiency so that British labour 'does not enjoy the same incontestably high relative position that it formerly did'.... At present our most highly equipped - and therefore most formidable - competitors are our kinsmen across the Atlantic. America is commercially formidable and not merely because of her illimitable resources, but because as recent investigators have shown, her workers are better nourished, and possess a relatively higher efficiency.[9]

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[9]The quotation in this passage is from Rowntree and Sherwell (1899).

Rowntree returned throughout his study to workers' 'physical efficiency', as might be expected in a study drawing on contemporary nutritional ideas (e.g. 1922: xi, 166, 255, 261, 359 and see the quote above on secondary poverty). Aronson has pointed out with reference to the United States in the late nineteenth century that 'efficiency' and 'equality' were two competing political philosophies - or moral judgements - of the place of the worker in society. While the equality philosophy argued that social structure was the cause of poverty, the efficiency philosophy took a different view. As Aronson puts it (1984: 4):

> The absolutist philosophy of efficiency viewed the worker as a machine that should be adequately maintained in order to maximize economic productivity.

Aronson quotes from Francis Walker - according to her the 'most influential American economist of his generation' (ibid.: 6), who Rowntree also quoted with approval (Rowntree 1922: 307) - as typifying the efficiency view. This efficiency philosophy viewed poverty as caused by a moral failure of the poor, and its proponents 'advocated teaching the poor to eat scientifically as a way to change the spendthrift habits that caused poverty' (Aronson, 1984: 7), a view common to much writing on poverty in nineteenth century Britain and also to Rowntree.[10]

As part of his interest in Britain as a trading nation, Rowntree was also concerned about 'harmonious social and industrial co-operation' (Rowntree 1922: xv), which could only be achieved by the presence of a well-fed workforce. A contemporary fear was the deterioration of the national physique through the movement of country labourers to the towns where they would become 'anaemic' (Rowntree 1913: 14).[11] There was also a similar concern here with social order that had been expressed by Booth (Rowntree 1913: 14):

> Already the country dwellers have given up their best, and this prospect, from the point of view of the maintenance of the national physique, is not bright.... Work on the land....produces a solid strength of character which our English nation can ill afford to lose. The town dweller, on the other hand, suffers from living too quickly and living in a crowd. His opinions are the opinions of the crowd - and a crowd is easily swayed, for evil as well as for good.

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[10]For a review of more recent studies on physical efficiency see Sharif (1986: 557, 561), and for a more general discussion concerning ideologies of different nutritional theories, Payne and Cutler (1984: 1490). See also Chakrabarty (1986: 265-269) for use of the term 'efficiency' with reference to the early twentieth century Bengali working class.

[11]See also the Inter-Departmental Committee 1904: 34.

The idea that the crowd may be 'swayed....for evil' led to a concern about the foundations of a democratic system with one quarter of its population living in poverty (Rowntree 1922: 360-1):

> There is surely need for a greater concentration of thought by the nation upon the well-being of its own people, for no civilization can be sound or stable which has as its base this mass of stunted life.

These ideas were a part of the overall makeup of Rowntree's industrial philosophy and representative of views held throughout the nineteenth century on the need for a compliant workforce (see Thompson 1986: chapter 11; Lis and Soly 1979: 195; Hobsbawm 1975: 246-81). Here are Booth's 'ready materials for disorder', the 'lawless and furious rabble' (Thompson 1986: 66; and see Hobsbawm 1975: 211) who were a threat to industry, and to the moral and social order.[12]

Booth and Rowntree re-defined for their own purposes the moral pre-occupations of their time as to the nature of the working class, without considering in detail the structural causes of poverty or the nature of the democracy they wished to preserve. The purpose of this section was to show that the origins of the poverty line were influenced by the contemporary moral and political environment, which also determined views of the poor; and to show that the origins of poverty measurement were integrally connected to contemporary views of the poor and attempts at regulation. But while criticizing Booth and Rowntree as 'moral statisticians', it should be noted that they both displayed considerable compassion and concern for the poor; both of their work contains long and detailed case studies of poor families giving sympathetic accounts of their lifestyles. Despite this, both of these writers were trapped within moral codes of their time; they began a tradition of quantification that developed from a separation of the poor into moral categories, and that took it for granted that the poor were objects of state control. Regulatory policy followed naturally from their moral and economic attempts at measurement. In the context of poverty measurement in India, this tradition developed as a concentration on techniques of quantification, while maintaining, implicitly, the moral and political concerns of Booth and Rowntree. This is addressed in the next section.[13]

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[12]Aronson (1984: 5-6) notes that the nutritional studies conducted by W.O. Atwater, the first Chief of the U. S. Office of Nutritional Investigation, were funded by, among others, a 'network of economists, statisticians, and philanthropists concerned about labour violence.' Rowntree quoted extensively from Atwater (see 1922: 119-25) to support his estimates of the poverty line.

[13]The idea of a 'culture of poverty' has been influential in more modern formulations of causes of poverty, such as those propagated by Oscar Lewis and his followers (see

2.3 Poverty measurement in India

Harriss has noted, reviewing South Asian studies (1988: 44): 'The Indian controversies over the definition and measurement of poverty and hunger are of fundamental and not just local significance....'. Part of the importance of this debate on poverty measurement is that estimates of the number in poverty partly determines government policy (Sen 1974).[14] In contemporary India, poverty measurement is one main method of focussing on poverty. This section outlines how Indian academics and planners working within the same paradigmatic structure, and with the same preoccupations, as Rowntree and Booth, have followed British tradition and connected the measurement of poverty to a particular view of the poor, and political world view. The section also discusses 'poverty line language', a form of rhetoric that implicitly denies agency to the poor; and explanations of the causes of poverty as expressed in macro level studies.

This section does not deal with the accuracy of the literature on poverty measurement, which has mainly used macro level statistics on income and nutrition to set a poverty line. The debate has been summarized elsewhere by several authors (Sagar 1988; Thakur 1985; Cutler 1984; Siddiqui 1982: 12-23; Chaudhuri 1978: 195-210). Nor does it cover methodological objections to a 'head count' poverty line, which are considered in section 2.4.

2.3.1 The history of poverty measurement in India

Prevailing themes on poverty from the British nineteenth century reappear in state documents from colonial India - particularly the view of the poor as apathetic and irresponsible, and the connection between efficiency and nutrition. This is one result of the social background of British administrators and colonial ideology in India (on which, see Guha 1986e: 19-25; Stokes 1959: 47-80). The similarity can be noted between statements in the *Report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture in India* , set

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Schaffer 1985: 54-8; Townsend 1979: 66-71; Siddiqui 1982: 28-30), which picks up on the tradition of nineteenth century morality studies of the poor, and attempts to identify the characteristics of a social sub-group called the poor. A discussion of the culture of poverty theory can be found in Wade (1973). Explanantion has also concerned various economic theories, (Townsend 1979: 71-9; Holman 1978: 69), which have developed from the 'efficiency' debate discussed above, as well as functionalist explanations, which attribute inequality and poverty to individual charactersitics of the poor (Townsend 1979: 83-5).

[14]For example, since 1985 the British Government has not used a formal measure of poverty, and critics suggest this is to forestall criticism of there being increasing numbers below the 'poverty line' which was formerly used (Townsend and Gordon 1989).

up to examine agricultural development, and that quoted above from the House of Commons Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration, as to the lack of entrepreneurship among the poor:

> ....at the heart of the problem (of improved agriculture in India) lies the development of the desire for a higher standard of living.... the dominant feature in rural India in the present day is that the will to live better is not a force to be reckoned with. (Government of India 1928: 499)

Seventeen years later the Famine Inquiry Commission (Government of India 1945a, b) produced a wide ranging report on the 1943 famine in India. One of the Commission's terms of reference was 'the possibility of improving the diet of the people' (1945b: vii). The authors complained of poor people's lack of flexibility in their eating habits, in a passage similar to that of Eden quoted above (Government of India 1945a: 176):

> During the famine large supplies of wheat and millet were sent to Bengal and helped to relieve food shortage. They were supplied to rice eaters through the free kitchens but efforts to persuade people to eat them in their homes in place of rice met with little success.

The report also made a connection between health and industry, and nutrition and physical efficiency, similar to that made by Rowntree (ibid.: 109-110). And in a passage almost identical to the earlier opinions of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration (1904: 37), another theme - on the ignorance of the poor mother - appears (Government of India 1945b: 108):

> The general experience of those concerned with infant mortality and infant welfare work supports the view that much sickness and mortality among infants are due to the faulty feeding of mother and child.[15]

Such statements leave little room for the idea of the poor as agents, or for examination of underlying structures that may cause poverty.[16]

The view of the poor as 'ignorant ryots' (Government of India 1945b: 79) fed into the first attempts to set a poverty line in India, which was based, as in Britain, on the nutritional intake of urban workers. The poverty line was first introduced by the

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[15]For a discussion of the 'ignorant mother' as a target of contemporary nutritional education policies, see Wheeler (1985).

[16]For other colonial views of the poor as ignorant, lazy and passive, see Dasgupta (1985: 102); Arnold (1984: 63); and Siddiqui (1982: 48).

Bombay Labour Enquiry Committee in 1937-40 (Thakur 1985: 33). Following this the *Report of the Central Wage Board for the Cotton Textile Industry* published in 1960, fixed a mimimum wage based on Rowntree's method of combining nutritional data and expenditure on clothing, housing, fuel, lighting and other miscellaneous items (Franklin 1967: 279- 80)

However, the first generally followed use of a poverty line based on income in India was in 1961 by the Perspective Planning Division of the Planning Commission, under the guidance of Pitambar Pant. This report was highly influential and laid the groundwork for future attempts at poverty measurement. It set the minimum necessary expenditure for a family of five to be above the poverty line at 20 rupees a month.[17] According to this measure, the authors found that 'half the population lives in abject poverty' (Pant 1974: 12). The consequences of this were discussed in the first paragraphs of the report, in a passage that would be in place in Rowntree's writings (Pant 1974: 13):

> Such widespread poverty is a challenge which no society in modern times can afford to ignore for long. It must be eradicated both on humanitarian grounds and as an essential condition for orderly progress. No programme or policy which fails to alleviate the conditions of the poor appreciably can hope for the necessary measure of public co-operation and political support in a mature democracy.

That this influential document should concern itself with the relation between quantification, 'orderly progress' and democracy is consistent with the ideological history of poverty measurement, and the former connections made between poverty measurement and social progress.[18]

The Planning Commission's report on poverty was followed by two widely discussed articles, by Dandekar and Rath (1971a, 1971b), on the dimensions and trends of poverty in India, and the number of those below the poverty line. In the same way as Rowntree and Pant, Dandekar and Rath's quantification was indivisible from a fear of the inevitable undermining of the 'democratic foundations of the economy' if the gains of development were not distributed equally (1971a: 47). They repeat these fears in the conclusion to the second article (1971b: 146), where they discuss the possibility of revolution if the 'minimum legitimate needs' of the increasingly 'desperate poor' are not 'attended to'. And in a passage dealing with migration from urban to rural areas in India

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[17]For the arbitrary origins of this 'magic' figure, since used by many authors, see Rudra (1974: 281).

[18]For a similar theme from the same volume, see Vaidyanathan (1974: 215). None of the studies quoted in this section acknowledge their British heritage.

in the 1960's (1971a: 40), they re-voice Rowntree's fears of the crowd being 'swayed, for evil as well as for good':

> All the latent dissatisfaction about the slow progress of the economy and the silent frustration about its failure to give the poor a fair deal ....appear to be gathering in this form (in slum life in the cities). Its shape today is probably no more than hideous, allowed to grow unheeded and unrelieved it will inevitably turn ugly.[19]

Dandekar and Rath also followed nineteenth century British tradition by suggesting a policy of the formation of workcamps for the poor (Dandekar and Rath 1971b: 140-2):

> A rural works programme aimed at offering continuous and regular employment for a section of the agricultural proletariat.... must.... move the people who are willing to work to wherever work exists. It is unlikely to be near everybody's home. It may be within the block, within the district or even outside the district. Wherever it may be, the workers must be moved to where the work exists and when the work in one place is finished, they must be moved to another place. An organization must perform this essential function....

The poor, or in this case the 'agricultural proletariat', having been measured, can be shipped around by a state organization, in a scheme involving large scale movement of the population in a fashion similar to that suggested by several nineteenth century British authors.

2.3.2 Contemporary poverty measurement and 'poverty line language'

Most writers on poverty measurement after Dandekar and Rath have focussed exclusively on quantifying the poor at the macro-level by use of the head count poverty measure, using a single indicator of poverty, and this is now a dominant theme in the literature on poverty in India. A sampling of this literature[20] supports Chambers' view (1988: 2) that the preoccupation of academics writing on poverty measurement in India has been with 'flows and measurement', to the exclusion of any examination of the conceptual issues underlying such analyses of poverty.

Questioning these conceptual issues and this paradigm of statistical measurement involves concentrating on at least two areas. The first, dealt with in this section, is the

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[19]Compare the Draft Fifth Five Year Plan (Government of India 1973: 6) which considers the existence of poverty 'a potential threat to the unity, integrity and independence of the country'. And see also section 2.5 for similar views.

[20]See Dayal (1989); Singh (1989); Ranade (1988); Ahluwalia (1986); Kurien (1982); Rao, B.S. (1982); Rao, V.K.R.V. (1982); Bhanoji Rao (1981); Dandekar (1981); Rao and Vivekananda (1981); Sukhatme (1981); Sastry (1980); Chaudhuri (1978); Chatterjee et al (1974); Minhas (1974); Vaidyanathan (1974); Bardhan (1973, 1970).

particular view that the literature on poverty measurement takes of the Indian poor. The second, discussed in section 2.3.3, is the cause of poverty, and the relation between this and the 'characteristics' of the poor.

Implicit in debates about setting a poverty line are attitudes towards the poor. Contemporary literature on Indian poverty measurement, with its concentration on statistics, has essentially 'demoralized' the debate on poverty, in that there are no more explicit references to the poor as 'passive' or 'ignorant'. The poor have been shunted aside as the main centre of interest, and measurement has taken central place.

This subjugation of moral to statistical priorities does not mean, however, that no view is taken of the poor. What is termed here 'poverty line language' makes implicit assumptions about those being measured. The assumptions are the same as those made by earlier writers on poverty - that the poor are passive, by being 'available' for measurement. In planning documents and the literature on poverty measurement the poverty line is visualized as a physical line which separates poor from non-poor. The aim of policy then becomes to push poor people over this line, or help them rise above it. The physical nature of this language is determined by the methodology involved in setting the poverty line.

Reference in this language is made to those 'weaker sections of society' who are 'socially and economically backward', whose 'social and economic status' must be 'raise(d)' (Government of India 1985: 328); to those who could be 'pushed above the poverty line by (the) resource flows ' (Sundaram and Tendulkar 1983: 1932); those 'vulnerable sections' who 'through special or specific beneficiary oriented assistance....could be brought above the poverty line' (Government of India 1981: 17O); who 'suffer special disadvantages due to lack of access to both education and health services'; and whose 'isolation severely limits appropriate delivery services for human development.' (Bussink 1980: 106).[21]

This is a language of bureaucratic planning, with 'targets', 'aims', and recipients ready to be 'pushed', 'raised', accept delivery and be 'attended to'. It is also the language of control. The poor, which the poverty line identifies as a homogenous mass,

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[21]See also Saith (1990: 174); Bhanoji Rao (1981: 347); and Mellor (1976: 89). Torry (1986: 14) has also referred (without apparent irony, but perhaps with the Indian mystic tradition in mind) to labourers 'levitated....above the official cut-off poverty line of Rs. 346/capita/year.' For use of the terms 'uplift, reform, rehabilitation, guidance and enlightenment' with reference to social welfare organizations in Tamil Nadu, see Caplan (1985: 202).

ignoring groups among the poor, have become statistical 'counters' with which statisticians can play. It is a short step from this movement of millions above and below lines to the type of policy suggested by Dandekar and Rath, a system to physically move 'willing' workers around the country to wherever work is available.[22]

This statistical 'science' of poverty measurement is neither 'objective' nor apolitical. Following a nineteenth century British heritage, measurement, the character of the poor, and the threat poverty poses to democracy are indivisibly connected. Measurement becomes one necessary step in policy making, and policy developed from macro-scale statistical measurement has necessarily involved regulation of the poor, who are seen as subject to irrational and dangerous behaviour. The statistical debate on poverty measurement also therefore operates within a specific paradigm which deals with numbers rather than people, and which upholds a view of the poor as passive and without agency.

2.3.3 Poverty and causality

Townsend has commented (1979: 64):

> Any statement of policy to reduce poverty contains an implicit if not explicit explanation of its cause. Any explanation of poverty contains an implicit prescription for policy. Any conceptualization of poverty contains an implicit explanation of the phenomenon.

To this I would add that any form of poverty measurement contains an explicit or implicit view of those being measured, and the explanation involved with poverty measurement has historically been that poverty is the responsibility of the poor.

This section examines one example of contemporary explanation of poverty from India at macro level. Michael Lipton has written a series of papers (1985; 1984 a, b; 1983a, b, c) that attempt to show dislocations between the poor and poorest in terms of nutrition, demography, assets and labour, using statistical data mainly from rural India and northern Nigeria. I concentrate on these texts from Lipton's work as they deal specifically with the 'poorest', a group on which this thesis focusses. There is scope here to discuss in detail only one of these papers, *Poverty, undernutrition and hunger*, but the comments on it below are valid for all of the papers. It should be noted, however, that the following comments refer only to the series of papers under discussion and not to the whole corpus of Lipton's work. Lipton has elsewhere devoted

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[22]For a similar point, see Wood (1985 a, b) on what he calls 'labelling' of the poor as 'targets'.

significant effort to analysis of relations between power structures and poverty (see Lipton, 1989; Lipton, 1977).

In *Poverty, undernutrition and hunger* Lipton uses the same narrow methdology as the papers quoted in the last section in setting his poverty lines.[23] He rejects relative measures of poverty as 'arbitrary', and instead insists on the need for a poverty line based on income to indicate how to distribute resources (1983a: 16). Drawing on recent nutritional evidence, and using calorie intake estimated from income as a measure, Lipton separates the 'ultra poor' (the 10-15% of the population at risk from clinical undernutrition) from those hungry but not at clinical risk (the 'poor'). The characteristics of the ultra poor are that they are those who, although spending 70-80% of their outlay on food, cannot afford 80% of average dietary energy requirements for their age, sex and activity group, while the poor are those able to afford over 80% but not 100% of requirements (1983a: 35).[24]

The purpose behind Lipton's research is to find out why the World Bank's 'activities on poor people' (sic) have managed to benefit the poor, but have missed the poorest (Lipton 1983a: 1). The premise for all of the papers is (ibid.):

> It may be, or course, that the "power structure" somehow prevents the poorest quartile of households in low-income countries - or the poorest decile in middle-income countries - from sharing the fruits of growth, while allowing moderately poor people to do so. Before accepting such a complicated hypothesis, however, we should look at the alternative: that very poor people, (unlike the moderately poor), have characteristics that affect their capacity to benefit from development programs.

"Power structures" are therefore not held responsible for poverty, but instead the 'characteristics' of the poorest are. However, Lipton does not define "power structures" in any of his papers. Nor does he show how these supposed characteristics of the ultra poor 'affect their capacity to benefit from development programs'.

Lipton's hypothesis entails a separation of the scientifically measurable characteristics of the poorest from the political nature of "power structure". There is nothing new, as far as poverty measurement is concerned, in this concentration on the characteristics of poor people rather than wider examination of social structure. As was seen in the first section of this chapter, in nineteenth century England moral failings of the poor were seen as the cause of poverty. In Lipton's analysis the former moral failings of the poor

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[23]None of the papers referred to in section 2.3 on measurement of poverty, except for those by Dandekar and Rath, deal with political causality - rather, they ignore it.

[24]Lipton also outlines other characteristics of the ultra poor, e.g. that they are fewer and more underfed than the poor, and that they maintain the percentage of outlay spent on both food and cereals and starchy roots as expenditure rises (1983a: 36-9; 40-49).

have become physical characteristics, and the cause of poverty remains, implictly, the responsibility of the poor.

Lipton's arguments are also linked to the 'physical efficiency' debate; in Lipton's terminology 'physical efficiency' becomes 'physical work performance' (ibid.: 15). Decreasing poor people's nutritional requirements (ibid.: 7) is also seen to decrease their need for wages. The relative benefits of dietary over political reform is brought out in another of Lipton's papers (1983b: 70) discussing discrimination against women in relation to the nutritional findings:

> ....women do have considerably lower average body-weight than men - 15% lower in rural India ....Crudely, any sex differences in wage - especially task-specific wage-per hour, per kg. of body weight, in India may be very small indeed; obviously fat people cannot *ipso facto* expect higher wages, but task discrimination against a group (women) with lower food need will, in societies where most wages are spent on food, create the illusion of wage discrimination against that group.

This is an accurate observation within the narrow confines of scientific measurement. But given a wider perspective it relates to the 'efficiency' philosophy discussed in section 2.2. As noted, in the efficiency philosophy the relation between the worker's food intake and their work output are of central concern, and it was suggested above that the 'efficiency' philosophy conceptualises poor people as instruments of capital. Equally, in the efficiency view, as in Lipton's papers, characteristics of the poor rather than "power structures" are located as explaining poverty.

It is illustrative here to quote a comparative, but alternative, micro-level view that has also considered women's wages, as well as power structure as a cause of poverty. Breman (1985a: 277) notes in a discussion of changing employment relationships in Gujarat:

> There is no connection between the burden of work and payment for it. This is according to the principle that it is not the actual performance which is the yardstick but the minimal subsistence requirements of those who perform. According to this line of thinking women are supposed to have even fewer needs, i.e. they are able to survive on less than what a male worker needs. For instance, for the extremely strenuous weeding of rice fields during the monsoon, where.... labour is available in abundance, female workers receive the lowest current wage, even though they must stand bent over in water all day, with the rain falling in torrents, ...(and) although the work they do is ....sometimes more strenuous than that performed by men. Only when there is a labour shortage do these differences disappear.

Breman notes that employers justified payment of low wages to labourers in general by harping on the characteristics of the latter, which they saw as including (ibid.: 285): 'laziness, drunkenness, lack of regularity, ignorance and apathy'. Employers also played on the theme that labourers 'have less needs than 'ordinary' people, and can thus make do with less.' (ibid.: 301). This is a radically different, and, I would argue, much wider perspective than the one taken in Lipton's discussion of women and poverty.[25]

This section has shown how the contemporary focus on poverty measurement and quantification in India has followed a tradition of concentrating on the characteristics of the poor as the cause of poverty. This is not to suggest that all forms of quantification necessarily lead to social control or are based on particular views of the poor. Rather the situation in India has been one historical incidence of such an occurence. I will argue throughout this thesis that such a view of poverty is inadequate because of its narrowness of definition and explanation, and that quantification or description of poverty needs to be balanced by both explicit explanation of causality, and analysis that takes into account poor people's agency.

2.4 Wider approaches to poverty

Sections 2.2 and 2.3 have considered 'absolute' or 'biological' measures using single indicators of poverty, and also explanations of poverty. This section is a critical review of selected contemporary attempts to widen the discussion on the nature of absolute and relative poverty in South Asia and Britain.

2.4.1 Criticisms within the measurement paradigm

There have been several criticisms of the use of the head count poverty line from within the paradigm of poverty measurement. Sen has pointed out that the head count method ignores both distribution and transfer of income below the poverty line. It also has political implications, in that a concentration of government resources on those just below a head count poverty line will bring in 'rich dividends', as their income needs to be raised only slightly for them to cross the line, while 'the credit for pushing up even poorer people is likely to be zero in this measure unless they are pushed up quite a bit.' (Sen 1976: 214, 219; 1974: 78). Sen has developed his own measure of poverty, 'P',

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[25]Similar views held by the rural and urban elite as to the characteristics of the poor being the cause of their poverty can be found in Bose (1984: 162) and Davis (1983: 104) writing on West Bengal, and Caplan (1985: 202) on Tamil Nadu. Caplan links these views to attempts made by social welfare organizations to change the character of poor people as a solution to poverty. As B. Harriss (1987: 39) has noted, it is micro level study that has the 'unique' potential of contextualizing poverty, even if this potential has been seldom fulfilled in studies of rural India. This potential is further discussed in the next chapter.

which takes account of both 'distance' from the poverty line and the relative distribution of income below it (Sen 1976: 214, 229; 1974: 78).

Gaiha (1988; 1987; Gaiha and Kazmi1981), among others, follows Sen in his use of the 'P' index to examine income and expenditure of 4,118 households throughout India. A wide number of indicators of poverty are used in these studies, including dependency ratios, land size and ownership, household size, work participation rates for female and all earners, and educational levels. Despite this, Gaiha's studies are highly abstract; there is no geographical background to the areas of data collection of any kind in his papers, and no attempt to contextualize poverty in its social setting. Also, the poor remain, as in other studies of poverty measurement, objects of state planning (see Gaiha 1987: 504).

Gaiha and Kazmi (1981: 77-8) also consider the fact that the head count method does not take into account intra-household distribution. As Agarwal has written (1986: 166):

> We could.... have poor women among households in which the average income/expenditure level puts the household above the poverty line, and not-poor men among households which are below the poverty line.

Distribution within the household has been discussed by various authors (see Sen 1990; Harriss 1986; and for a review of recent economic literature, Folbre 1986: 11-26). Folbre comments that the Indian National Sample Survey is now set up to provide data on intra-household flows of income (ibid.: 23). This matter is taken up again in chapter seven, using findings from my field work.[26]

A further criticism of poverty lines based on income is that these do not consider extra-economic contributions to poor people's subsistence. Bardhan (1970: 135) mentions the importance to poor households of 'free goods like fuel.... fish and small game, (and) food grains picked up from the threshing floor etc. which may be underreported in consumer expenditure data.' This is rarely commented on in poverty measurement studies. I will discuss what I call the 'informal economy' in chapter seven, where I show its importance to the poorest. There have not, to my knowledge, been any attempts to include such elements of the informal economy in poverty line measures in the Indian literature.

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[26]Millar and Glendinning (1989) have pointed out that recent debates on poverty definition and measurement in Britain have tended to ignore gender issues.

It should be noted that none of these criticisms of the poverty line question its ideological basis, nor do they consider why measurement is being made.

2.4.2 Widening the focus on poverty

In discussion of poverty, 'absolute' and 'relative' approaches are generally separated (Siddiqui 1982: 12-23; Sen 1982: 11-14; Townsend 1979: 32). As mentioned above, absolute poverty is usually seen to have developed from the work of Booth and Rowntree, and is linked to a poverty line based on nutritional minima or income. In this approach, as stated by Sen (1982: 32), poverty has an absolutist core, because: 'If there is starvation and hunger, then - no matter what the *relative* picture looks like - there clearly is poverty.' The relative approach has been developed by Townsend and others (e.g. Townsend 1979). In this approach, poverty is seen as relative to the standards of the particular society under consideration (see below). Sen and Townsend have been two of the most influential contemporary authors on poverty, and the debate between them about relative and absolute poverty is illustrative of two approaches from different perspectives to widen the discussion on poverty. The discussion below will focus on these two authors' methods and their explanation and conceptualisation of poverty.

Sen's work on famine and entitlements (1982) suggests that starvation can be caused by entitlement failure (of food or other essential items) of certain groups who have insufficient bargaining power. Entitlement theory could be considered an explanation of poverty as well as for starvation, although *Poverty and Famines* is made up of two distinct parts, the first discussing measures and concepts of poverty, and the second on famines and entitlements, with little attempt made to link the two. Sen's explanation of poverty (or famine) is limited. Sen notes that he will carry out (1982: 6): '....a careful consideration of the nature of the modes of production and the structure of economic classes and their interrelations.' The case studies in the book, however, mainly consider the relation between rice prices and levels of wages during periods of famine. The case study of the Bengal famine of 1943, for example, is both apolitical in its failure to consider the 'structure of economic classes', and ahistorical in its failure to consider the pre-1943 situation and how these classes came to be in their relative positions.[27] It is also worth noting the similarity in the entitlement approach to that of certain proponents of the moral economy theory, discussed in section 2.5, as both essentially conceptualize the poor as passive recipients of state or patron support.

In subsequent work (Sen 1990; 1985; 1983; Kynch and Sen 1983) Sen and others have extended discussion of entitlement theory and the absolutist approach by

[27]On which, see chapter four.

discussing well-being and poverty in terms of what a person 'can and cannot do' (Kynch and Sen 1983: 366). As Dreze and Sen put it (1989: 13): 'The focus on entitlements, which is concerned with the command over *commodities*, has to be seen as only instrumentally important, and the concentration has to be, ultimately, on basic human capabilities.'

For Sen, the narrow economic analysis of the kind described in sections 2.2 and 2.3 is therefore to be avoided. He has written: 'The capability approach....continues to concentrate on human beings' (Sen 1983: 164). Or again (Sen 1985: 4):

> What is objectionable in the economic theorizing that identifies widely different concepts of self-interest .... is .... the particular simplification chosen, which has the effect of taking a very narrow view of human beings (and their feelings, ideas and actions).

The capability approach involves examining how far an individual can achieve certain basic aims. Indicators of capability proposed are the ability to survive, be well nourished, free from disease, literate, to receive medical attention, and latterly, the ability of women to work (Sen 1990; 1985: 45; 1983: 367). Sen argues that the capability approach is an alternative to both 'commodity fetishism', which attempts to define well being or poverty in terms of commodities owned or needed rather than what can be achieved with commodities, and 'utilitarian mental-metricism', which focusses on well being in terms of perceptions of individuals (ibid. : 366). This is an attempt to steer a course away from 'absolute' views of poverty, measured in terms of commodities or income needed to meet a nutritional minimum, and to include the poor as people who can achieve basic capabilities.[28]

While Sen's concept of capabilities attempts to take into account agency, it comes down on the side of the absolute approach. Townsend has attacked the capability approach thus (1985: 665):

> Sen does not offer any serious criterion of poverty other than income. The 'subsistence' measure (of food, clothing, shelter) is insufficient as

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[28]For a fuller discussion of mental-metricism, see chapter five. The capability approach is an extension of concepts such as basic needs and the physical quality of life index (PQLI), which consider poverty in terms of access of individuals to basic services, and the comments made here on Sen's work are valid for these approaches. On basic needs in India see Lakdawala (1988); Rudra (1981b). The Directive Principle of State Policy of the Indian constitution directs the state to provide minimum needs defined as adequate means of livelihood, assistance in old age, sickness or unemployment, and free education to children (Lakdawala 1988: 389). On the PQLI, which uses infant mortality, life expectancy and literacy as indicators, see Morris and Mcalpin (1979). The similarity to Sen's indicators can be noted.

> it almost excludes social need .... Sen also partly accepts an alternative "relative deprivation" without showing how these elements can be reconciled with his "absolutist" perspective.

It is also ironic that while he has used the term 'capabilities', Sen should have chosen narrow indicators, rather than considering areas where poor people are really capable in terms of shaping their societies (on which, see chapter seven). Equally, while the capability approach may discuss well-being, it does not extend understanding of the causes of poverty beyond the explanations given in entitlement theory.[29]

Sen's work has partly been a reaction to Townsend's, which has developed an alternative to absolute approaches to poverty using the term 'relative deprivation' to describe his relative approach (Townsend 1985; 1979; 1970; Townsend and Gordon 1989; Abel-Smith and Townsend 1965). Townsend's starting point is the narrowness of the concept of subsistence, a concept seen to originate in Rowntree's work (Abel-Smith and Townsend 1965: 15). Townsend suggests that (1979: 54):

> ....to concentrate on cash income is to ignore the subtle ways developed in both modern and traditional societies for conferring and redistributing benefits.

Townsend (1979: 31) therefore attempts to redefine poverty in the following way:

> Poverty can be defined objectively and applied consistently only in terms of the concept of relative deprivation.... Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong.... they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs, and activities.

In his survey of approximately 2,000 randomly chosen households in the U.K., Townsend uses 60 indicators of deprivation to take into account customary living conditions. These included 'objective' indicators covering diet, clothing, fuel, housing, and style of living, and 'subjective' indicators concerning opinions of people's deprivation in relation to the rest of their family or others in the locality, and conceptions of poverty. Applying these indicators, a 'score' of deprivation was added up, households ranked and a line set below which households are seen to be excluded from 'common lifestyles' (ibid.: 249-255).

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[29]Sen's more recent work on capabilities has stressed that the poor are 'agents' (e.g. Sen 1990; Dreze and Sen 1989), without effectively widening the capability paradigm.

Townsend has therefore defined poverty in a different manner to the absolutist approach, in that his definition includes aspects of poverty relative to norms of society. Townsend's method, however, rests in the final instance on, as he puts it, 'hard data' (1979: 237; and see also 1979: 46-49, 429, 912), mainly connected to income. There is, however, a wide difference between Townsend's and Sen's perceptions of the causes of poverty. Townsend is clear that poverty can be explained by 'class relations' and the 'Institutions (which) arise to control both the production and allocation of resources.' (ibid.: 916-7). This is a more articulate approach than the one adopted by followers of the absolutist approach. Townsend's work also shows that quantitative approaches do not necessarily feed into policy concerned with regulation of the poor, as Townsend's methods of eliminating poverty include social changes such as abolition of excessive wealth and unemployment (ibid.: 926). However, such changes are to be accomplished by the state, and there is no discussion of poor people's involvement in them; and the same can be said for Sen's work.[30]

The relation between absolute and relative approaches is a complex one; as Harriss (1988: 53) has noted: 'There is still a long way to go in combining the insights into people's own categories and the accuracy of measurement of micro-studies, with the analytical power of some formal modelling.' (see also Ringen 1988). Rather than discussing technical issues here, however, I will continue the discussion begun in sections 2.2 and 2.3 as to the ideological underpinnings of these different approaches to poverty.[31]

Firstly, as Veit-Wilson has pointed out (1986: 74 - 81, and see Ringen 1988, for an extension of this point), Townsend's concentration on Rowntree as the originator of an 'absolute measure of poverty' is misplaced. As seen in section 2.2, Rowntree's approach to poverty also involved consideration of 'obvious want and squalor' and neighbours' opinions, in determining secondary poverty. From its origins, therefore, poverty measurement combined a relative approach based on 'opinion' and an absolute approach based on income.[32] Sen (1983: 161) has also misread Rowntree in the same way. Both Sen and Townsend have therefore attempted to adopt a balance between absolute and relative approaches without a clear understanding of the history of poverty

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[30]Veit-Wilson (1987) also concludes that Townsend has exchanged social science expertise for nutritional expertise in his approach to poverty and his attitude towards the poor.

[31]The difficulty of comprehending different approaches to poverty can be seen from the following confused statement from a recent World Bank publication on poverty in Bangladesh (Sackey 1989: 6-7): 'The debate on whether absolute or relative concepts are appropriate is.... simply about choice of a *poverty line* .'

[32]The same is true of Booth's work (see 1969: 9)

measurement, and the relation in Rowntree's and Booth's work between morality, regulation and measurement.[33]

Secondly, attempts by Sen and Townsend to broaden the study of poverty remain within the same paradigm on which poverty measurement was originally based. Sen's concept of capabilities still comes from a world of central planning and formal economic modelling, where the ability to read or attend hospitals is a proxy for poor people's activities and agency. Townsend's approach has attempted to include 'felt deprivation', but this is subsumed under 'hard data', and his solutions to poverty remain those that can be put into practice by the state for the poor (see 1979: 926). Such approaches to poverty measurement follow in a tradition of identifying and regulating the poor which neither author acknowledges. Again, this is not to suggest that there is no place for 'hard data', but only that its apparently 'objective' status may close out other forms of analysis that conceptualise the poor as agents. I would argue that a broader view of poverty will focus on the actual activities of the poor as well as different methods, relative or absolute, of quantifying them.

2.5 The 'political economy' view of the poor[34]

In this section I connect the literature on poverty measurement to views of the poor in other literature on India. In discussing the work of Moore (1987), Rudolph and Rudolph (1987), and Frankel (1978, 1971), who term themselves 'political economists', I will cover some of the most influential and often quoted literature on Indian society. In particular I will consider how these authors have adopted 'moral economy' theory, and the similarity of their views of the poor to those noted above in sections 2.2 and 2.3.[35]

The 'moral economy' theory has been popularized by Scott (Scott 1976, and see chapter three for a discussion of its origins). The political economists discussed here have adapted one strand of moral economy theory for their own purposes. This is that

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[33]A study by Prasad *et al* (1986) in Bihar, which includes indicators such as housing, clothing, health and mortality in the measurement of poverty, also retains a tension between what the authors call 'subjective' and objective deprivation (ibid.: 19). For other studies attempting to deal with 'subjective' perceptions of deprivation in an analytical framework, see Ringen 1988; Chapman 1984; Goedhart *et al* 1977.

[34]The discussion in this section draws on Chomsky's methods in his analysis of United States domestic and foreign policy, and the support given to the state by individuals and institutions (see Chomsky 1967, Chomsky and Herman 1979a, 1979b). The work of Said on 'orientalism' has also been influential in determining the focus of this section.

[35]The discussion below is also valid for the work on Indian famine by Seavoy (1986).

the penetration of capital into subsistence agrarian systems erodes patron-client relationships that may have been unequal, but provided minimum security for all. The disruption of this security, and increasing differentiation caused by capitalist development, is then seen to be followed by rural instability and peasant protest. As my field work also covered capital-inspired rural development and patron client relations (see chapters six and seven), this literature is also of wider relevance to the thesis as a whole.

In Frankel's work the erosion of traditional patron client ties during economic modernization is a key concept. Although what constitutes the traditional is never clearly defined, her most common usage of the term comes in describing a breakdown in past agrarian relations, as is apparent from the following discussion of the effects of the green revolution (1971: 45-6):

> Occurring as these changes are in a local context characterized by an erosion in traditional ties, and an incipient polarization on the basis of class, it would not be surprising if efforts by political parties to mobilize social discontent for power purposes would lead to increasing instances of class confrontation in rural areas.[36]

How far these traditional ties provided subsistence for, or were supported by, the rural poor is not made clear, and cannot be assumed as it is here.

Rudolph and Rudolph (1987: 384-5) also comment on the traditional nature of pre-industrial agrarian ties in India :

> Under forms of traditional domination, the legitimizing ideologies and power asymmetries of local hierachies sustained interdependence with relatively stable local social equilibriums. Legitimizing ideologies sanctioned rights and obligations as well as duties and dependencies by linking putatively nonantagonistic strata in harmonious social order.

Moore (1987: 358-9) also uses the same idea of the pre-modern harmony existing in 'traditional' Indian rural society.

The formulation of the existence of a pre-modern 'harmonious social order' is dependent on the view that the lower castes and classes passively accepted the ideology of the prevailing order. Frankel notes a contemporary attack on: '....the traditional village system under which harmony was preserved by the mutual acceptance of

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[36]For similar comments, see Frankel (1978: 8, 21, 26, 582; 1971: 38, 40, 208). For a critique of the ahistorical nature of Frankel's work, see Harriss (1977: 34-6).

ascriptive inequalities sanctified by the religious myths of caste.' (1971: 116). In Frankel's work the poor are variously described as 'resigned', 'deferrent', and 'deeply conservative and inert, strongly committed to the traditional social hierachy of caste, and largely reconciled to their impoverishment' (1971: 10; 107; 177). A similar view is also taken by Moore, who writes of the 'passive acceptance' of their situation by the lower castes (1987: 335).[37]

The Rudolphs write in similar terms of the modern agricultural labourer (1987: 387): 'We infer that isolation accompanied by normlessness and apathy has replaced decaying mutual ties in many other local contexts....'. The term 'normlessness' here again implies that labourers simply echo elite norms.[38] Breman, whose work is quoted by the Rudolphs as supporting their arguments, has responded (1988: 30):

> To label the behaviour of Halpatis in terms of passivity, amoral individualism and fatalism, as Rudolph and Rudolph are apt to do.... would negate the forceful opposition shown by these landless workers against their physical and mental oppression.

And Breman makes the wider point (ibid.), also discussed in section 2.3, that calling the poor 'paupers with all the negative characteristics that are linked to that term', is one way of justifying the exclusion of local workers from the production process in the area he studied, and explaining poverty in terms of poor people's characteristics. In sections 2.2 and 2.3 above similar characteristics were seen to be imputed to the poor by poverty measurers.

As poor people are 'passive followers', it is the state or elites that are the main actors in poor people's lives. As Kothari has pointed out (1988: 275; and see also Byres 1988), the only conception the Rudolphs have of the state is a constitutional apparatus following rational economic development, in which citizens are reduced to voters. Even when discussing 'demand politics', the state in the Rudolphs' work is the central figure that directs policy from 'above'. Similarly in Frankel and Moore's work, actions of the poor are seen as reactions to the policies of the state. Hence their focus on elite intrigues and election politics, which are seen to determine public action.

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[37] Seavoy (1986: 260) also suggests that the main characteristic of the precapitalist peasant is laziness, and Bauer (1976: 191) comments on: 'The widely prevalent and readily observable torpor and inertia of the population of the Indian subcontinent....' .

[38] The Rudolphs therefore carry out here the kind of labelling of the poor of which they accuse others in their earlier work (1967: 9).

As well as being open to state manipulation, the poor, conceptualised as passive receivers of elite ideology are seen as increasingly susceptible to organization by forces other than the 'traditional'. I have shown above how poverty measurers saw the volatile nature of the poor as a threat to social structure, national stability and democracy. The political economists discussed here voice similar fears. As Frankel puts it (1971: 8): '....high rates of economic development may actually exacerbate social tensions, and ultimately undermine the foundation of rural political stability.' This leaves room for communist agitation and the possibility that the poor will become convinced by (ibid.: 185): '....the Marxist political propaganda that fundamental social change can only be accomplished by the complete overthrow of the existing property system.' [39] The Rudolphs also warn that the 'dissolution of traditional interdependence and absence of a reconstituted moral order' may lead to 'undeclared civil wars', the leading characteristic of these being 'spontaneous, leaderless violence against property and persons' (1987: 389-90) (note the common interest with Frankel in 'property').

Moore is circumspect as to the possibility of violent action by the poor, mainly because, oppressed by the caste system, they have embraced 'hierachical submission' (Moore, 1987: 378-85). But, writing a few years before Dandekar and Rath, and like Rowntree, Moore also saw the spectre of violence in the breakdown of the 'traditional' and the trend of urban migration (ibid.: 406):

> It seems likely that the direction of future changes will be toward further disintegration of traditional ties.... There is already a huge migration to urban slums where communist agitation does find considerable response. If no place in society is found for this mass of floating labor ....the political consequences might well be explosive.

This fear of spontaneous violence against 'property and persons' is similar to that voiced by measurers of poverty in Britain and India.[40] It is this view of the poor as passive, but subject to irrational violence, which is central to the political economy approach, that this thesis calls into question. In doing so it challenges the psychological and political imposition of unquestioned and untested overgeneralised theories onto the Indian poor.

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[39]For similar comments see Frankel (1978: xii, 3, 21, 580).

[40]Although there is no scope to discuss this at length, the political economists also share a similar concern to poverty measurers as to how to 'prevent another breakdown in the democratic process of government' (Frankel 1978: 582; and see also Moore 1987: 385-410).

2.6 Conclusions

This chapter has examined views of the 'characteristics' of the poor in the context of literature on poverty measurement and Indian politics. It has shown how such views in nineteenth century Britain and contemporary India are connected both to explanation of poverty and social prescription, and in some cases, social regulation, and that as far as the history of poverty measurement is concerned, the three meanings of 'to measure' cannot be separated. To put it simply, how the characteristics of the poor are conceptualised determines external reaction to the poor. Another common theme in the literature reviewed is that it denies poor people's agency, or the ability of the poor to shape their own lives or societies. The relevance of debates on poverty to this thesis is that dominant theories and paradigms representing the characteristics of poor people exist that need to be questioned by alternative theories and empirical research. There have been other ways in which poor people have been conceptualised, and these are discussed in the next chapter; the notion of the poor as passive or simply vessels for elite ideology is questioned again in chapter seven, with findings from the field.

Challenging the statistical paradigm, however, does not mean that it should be discarded. Statistical research and anthropological or geographical approaches attempting to explain the causes of poverty could be complementary. As B. Harriss (1987: 38) has put it, neither should 'rule the roost'. However, any approach to poverty measurement needs to comprehend its own history and conceptual approach, which has not been the case with contemporary studies.

There has not been scope in this chapter to discuss in detail various other limitations of the statistical approach to poverty. These include temporal limitations and limitations concerning the realities of rural existence, which by definition are excluded when a single indicator or poverty such as income is chosen. These limitations have been addressed in the work of Chambers (1988) and Jodha (1989). Chambers (1988:2) notes the narrow 'professional' preoccupation of debates on poverty in India on flows and measurement, pointing out how such a preoccupation ignores priorities of the poor such as security and self respect (ibid.: 17); and also that such a preoccupation ignores aspects of what Chambers calls 'deprivation' such as (ibid.: 3): '....access to water, shelter, health services, education or transport,.... indebtedness, dependence, isolation, migration, vulnerability, powerlessness or disability, high mortality or short life expectancy....'. Jodha's article also stresses that (Jodha, 1989: 175): 'The concepts and categories used to identify and classify rural realities are often too restrictive....'. Jodha compares changes between 1964-6 and 1982-4 in two villages in Rajasthan, western

India, using two 'measures'. The first is the standard measure of poverty, i.e. income, and the second is what Jodha calls 'qualitative' indicators (ibid.: 185), which were based on farmers' own perceptions of change. These qualitative indicators included reduced dependence on low paid jobs, improved mobility and shifts in consumption. Jodha found that, using the standard income measure, there had been an increase in the number of households below the poverty line, but by the qualitative indicators used, the overall situation of 35 households whose per capita annual income had declined by more than 5% during the period under review had actually improved. Jodha draws the following conclusion from his findings (ibid.: 193): '....change in economic status revealed by qualitative indicators is an outcome of gradual change over a period of time. A difference of per capita net income at two points of time may not capture this change. The measurement of income at one point in time captures only the current transitory component of income. The permanent components (accumulated transitory components) of income in the past are not captured. This reinforces the need for revising the research approach to understand the dynamics of rural change, and to cover permanent components of income besides the transitory components, each of which may not move in the same direction.' Such an approach to understanding the 'dynamics of rural change' is one of the aims of this thesis. Jodha's contribution is important in that it focusses on the viewpoint of the poor; however, as will be argued in the next chapter and in chapter seven, it is equally important to consider the abilities of the poor and how the poor can themselves contribute to the formation of policy.

This thesis does not set out to establish a new definition of poverty, as its central aim is to analyse the activities of the poorest within specific social and political parameters. However, the discussion above suggests that to be clear, useful and comprehensive, a definition of poverty should include both explicit statement as to the causes of poverty, and the role of poor people in society.

CHAPTER THREE
The Dimension of Human Agency

3.1 Introduction

This chapter considers a radically different tradition from that discussed in chapter two, a tradition that has focussed on what E.P. Thompson has termed (1986: 224) 'the dimension of human agency'. Like poverty, 'agency' has been defined in different ways within different disciplines, and this chapter will review selected discussions of agency relevant to the focus of this thesis. It should be noted at this point, however, that the field data in this thesis mainly considers the interaction of 'private' and 'public' agency and local structure[1], although national and regional structures are, less thoroughly, analysed in chapter four.

Agency can only be understood as it interacts with various forms of structure. As Marx put it (1977: 300): 'Men (sic) make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please. They do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.'[2] Political, social, economic, cultural and environmental structures can be located in the household, through to local, regional, national and international spheres and institutions. To give a theoretically based weight and emphasis to each level of structure as it interacts with different types of agency would be an enormous task. As Giddens has remarked (1987: 204): 'The problem of agency is a philosophical issue of some considerable complexity, one unlikely to be resolved by either sociologists or historians.' While agency remains complex, however, its importance as a concept is outlined in this chapter.

The chapter is organized in the following way. Section 3.2 discusses 'people's history' theory, and in particular the production of the History Workshop group and its relevance to a thesis on agency of the poor in contemporary West Bengal. Section 3.3 considers the work of the Marxist historian E. P. Thompson, the influence of whose writings can be found in almost all contemporary social science disciplines, and in particular the debates surrounding his use of the concepts of agency and experience. Section 3.4 extends the discussion of agency concentrating on moral economy theory, analysing in particular the work of James Scott. Section 3.5 discusses theories of participatory development, as well as contemporary literature that attempts to highlight the perceptions and priorities of the

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[1]These terms are defined in section 3.2 below.

[2]Women also make their own history, but, as Sarkar has noted (1987: 3): 'Women are generally rendered invisible in the works of historians and sublatern politics.' The discussion below should be taken to refer to both women and men.

Indian poor, and the importance of the perspective of this literature. While discussing these literatures close attention will be paid to their success in balancing agency and structure.

An ideological choice has been made in the concentration here on agency as it interacts with structure. Johnston (1989: 64) has differentiated 'critical' science, that is the meshing of agency and structure, from the quantitative tradition of 'empirical' science, which allows technical control of society, and 'hermeneutic' science which concentrates on agency without taking structure into account. Empirical science is considered to be one that dominates; as Ley puts it (1980: 19, and see Gangapathy 1985): '....the suppression of man in theory first reflects and then justifies his suppression in practice.... a passive theory of man justifies an ideology of domination.' The case given in chapter two of social control linked to a tradition of quantification of poverty is one example of this. Critical science, on the other hand, aims at liberation of the individual, as it concentrates on forces which constrain individuals, and views people not as ciphers or statistical 'counters' but as makers of their own histories, geographies, and futures, a point common to all of the literatures discussed in this chapter.

People's history, and the schools of thought it has directly and indirectly influenced, has informed the theoretical framework of this thesis in three ways. Firstly, it opposes the view, expressed in the literature reviewed in chapter two, of 'economic man', or of rural poor individuals or communities as passive recipients of ideology or environmental change, at the same time attempting to recover the experience of the poor. Secondly, it attempts to place these experiences in a wider political and social context, a contextualization essential to understanding constraints on the poor. And thirdly, it expresses a political sympathy with the rural poor, a sympathy that is central to this thesis and its choice of subject matter.

3.2 People's history and agency

'People's history' is a general term that covers a range of ideological stances and historical studies. This section reviews socialist and Marxist people's history theory, the way in which this strand of people's history theory examines the interaction of structure and agency, as well as the relevance of this theory for a contemporary study of poverty in rural West Bengal.

One strand of people's history stems from the History Workshop, a movement which concerned itself with class struggle 'at the point of production', and the cultural dimensions of politics (Samuel, 1980: 163). Samuel (1981: xv) traces people's history theory to Vico's Scienza Nova of 1725, and John Baxter's New and Imperial History of

England of 1796. Samuel also traces the influence of 'bourgeois-democratic' and populist ideas on Marxist thought, in particular their joint concern for the experience of the 'common' people. As Samuel puts it (1981: xxix):

> Marx himself certainly practised a species of people's history, and the debt to his predecessors in this respect - Vico, the Scottish historical school of the eighteenth century, the French liberal historians of the Restoration, the German folklorists and peasant historians - has hardly been explored. His whole account of "Capital" might be described, under one optic, as a history from below - the history of development seen through the eyes of its victims.

People's history theory opposes 'economic history which insisted on the primacy of the statistical, irrespective of the significance of what was being measured....' (Samuel 1980: 163). The central issue for socialist people's history in recent years has been the 'recovery of subjective experience' of the poor and the peasantry, to be contextualized in the relevant political setting (ibid.: xviii). This is therefore a history from below or 'from the bottom up' (ibid.: xxxi).[3] Here, then, is a radically different way of looking at poor people's experience from the approach of planners, social scientists and academics discussed in chapter two. The approach of people's history is doubly relevant for this thesis as it also concerns itself with rural poverty and the experience of the rural poor. People's history also discusses that most ignored of subjects, the political viewpoint of the poor as they themselves express it, and 'everyday politics' (Ludtke 1982: 52), to which I also return in chapter seven.

To give an example, the volume *Village Life and Labour*, edited by Samuel, attempts to recapture by use of case studies the life of that 'curiously anonymous figure' (Samuel 1982a: 3), the nineteenth century village labourer. The volume concentrates on an informal economy ignored by poverty measurement studies - poaching, gleaning, common rights, use of common property resources, livestock, migration, and patron-client ties, which played such a crucial part in poor people's lives (see Samuel 1982a; Kitteringham 1982; Morgan 1982). These 'survival strategies' of the nineteenth century labourer are areas still crucial for poor people in contemporary rural West Bengal, as my field work shows. It is the theoretical approach of this school which determines that their choice of subject matter will be close to the priorities of the poor, and in focussing on class struggle the school also concentrates on ways in which the poor have been active in opposing other classes, as well as restrictions other classes have attempted to place on the poor.

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[3]The latter is now a familiar phrase in development studies.

To give a more extended example that is of direct relevance to this thesis, Morgan's essay on the place of harvesters in nineteenth century village life in *Village Life and Labour* discusses in detail the practice of gleaning (Morgan 1982: 53-61), and there are close parallels between gleaning as practiced in nineteenth century Britain and contemporary West Bengal (see chapter seven). In both societies gleaning was carried out by women and children, gleaned grains made up an important and at times crucial part of poor households' income, and gleaning was a restricted practice. Class conflict manifested itself in disputes over gleaning in nineteenth century Britain. Morgan makes the point that it was (ibid.: 61): '....the clearest expression of the psychological advantage which the village labourer and his family enjoyed [over the farmer] in the few brief weeks of harvest.' Morgan elucidates the nature of this conflict (ibid.: 56):

> Gleaning was a universal practice in the corn-growing counties of nineteenth-century England, despite the fact that farmers and landowners, at different times, had attempted to put it down, or to bring it under tighter control. It was an ancient common right, embodied in the Mosaic Law, that harvest gleanings should be left 'unto the poor and the strangers'. It continued to be practised at a time when many other common rights were under attack. In 1787 the right to glean 'indefinitely' by 'poor, necessitous, and indigent persons' had been denied on the grounds that it was 'inconsistent with the nature of property', 'destructive of the peace and good order of society', and 'amounting to a general vagrancy'. This judgement was reinforced and re-stated in more comprehensive terms a year later by Lord Loughborough, the Lord Chief Justice, and two of his fellow judges.... But rights so deeply rooted in the needs and practices of the local communities could not be extinguished on the mere say-so of a High Court judge....'

While farmers could not prohibit gleaning, they attempted to restrict it, for example by limiting the privilege to those who had worked for them in the harvest (ibid.: 57-8). The above is a good example of the way in which socialist people's history concentrates on the priorities of the poor, the constraints placed on them, as well as class struggle at the point of production.

How far does people's history present a coherent theory that accounts for both agency and structure? Its ideal is to link the '....particular to general, the part to the whole, the individual moment to the longue duree ....' (Samuel 1981: xxxii). However, as Selbourne has argued (1980: 155-6), it often errs on the side of the 'narrative and the descriptive rather than the analytical', and can be 'facts without science.' Because of the necessity of concentrating on the particular experience of individuals and small groups, the wider frame is often lost, and the experience of individuals remains uncontextualized. For example, the essays cited above by Samuel and Kitteringham give detailed accounts of nineteenth century labourers' lives, but often do not contextualize these experiences within the wider

political framework. Similarly, analysis of the interaction between agency and structure is secondary to recovery of subjective experience. This difficulty of accounting theoretically for the interaction of both agency and structure will be considered in more detail in the following sections.[4]

3.3 E.P. Thompson, agency and experience

E.P. Thompson has been one of the most influential historians writing history 'from the bottom up'. The starting point for most of Thompson's work can be found in the preface to the *The Making of the English Working Class*, a history of working class experience in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Thompson's aim is to oppose prevailing orthodoxies (ibid.: 11-12):

> There is the Fabian orthodoxy, in which the great majority of working people are seen as passive victims of laissez faire.... There is the orthodoxy of the empirical economic historians, in which working people are seen as a labour force, as migrants, or as the data for statistical series.... My quarrel (with these) is that they tend to obscure the agency of working people, the degree to which they contributed by conscious efforts, to the making of history.

For Thompson (ibid.: 213), the 'working class made itself as much as it was made.' The organizing feature of the book and much of Thompson's other work is an attempt to recover 'the dimension of human agency', and counterpoise this historically with social structure (ibid.: 224; Thompson 1971: 76-9). This emphasis on members of the working class as active participants in the making of their societies is closely tied to Thompson's opposition to what he views as Marxist economic determinism where, in Marxist terminology, the economic 'base' or social being determines the cultural 'superstructure' or social consciousness. That all human activity is determined by economic forces is obviously alien to historical analysis that places human beings centre stage as makers of history. Thompson instead views the economic and the cultural as involved in a complex dialectic relation (Kaye 1984: 206-7; Thompson 1978: 9; 1977: 260-4).

This theoretical approach moves Thompson to consider the world view of the subaltern. Thus, in *The Making of the English Working Class*, he considers that the 'crucial

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[4]The literature on people history is now voluminous, and there is not scope here to discuss it in detail. However, reference can be made to Reeves' (1979) account of working class lives in London between 1909 and 1913; and the Hammonds' (1948) sympathetic account of the eighteenth and nineteenth century British village labourer. Literary examples of people's history from urban and rural early twentieth century Britain can be found in Tressell (1965) and Thompson (1983) respectively. A 'participant observation' account of the London poor can be found in Orwell (1981), and a less sympathetic account in London (1903).

experience of the Industrial Revolution was felt in terms of changes in the nature and intensity of exploitation' (1986: 218). Exploitation is seen in 'the reduction of man to the status of an "instrument" ....(and) turned on issues which are not encompassed by cost-of-living series. The issues which provoked the most intensity of feeling were very often ones in which such values as traditional customs, "justice", "independence", security, or family economy were at stake....' (ibid.: 222). Thompson describes the experience of poverty as felt by the agricultural labourer, one of several groups on which he concentrates his discussion. Decrying the use of wages as a measure of 'well being', he argues that (ibid.: 238): 'the social violence of enclosure consisted precisely in the drastic, total imposition upon the village of capitalist property definitions.' Looking at society in the eighteenth century from the standpoint of the villager, he writes that: '....one finds a dense cluster of claims and usages, which stretch from the common to the market-place and which, taken together, make up the economic and cultural universe of the rural poor.' (ibid.: 239). Thompson outlines some of these claims from the 'informal economy', which were very similar to those noted by Samuel above (ibid.). Also of note in Thompson's work is his outlining of different values and ideologies of the rich and poor, an idea that informs much of his empirical enquiry (see Thompson 1990, 1978a, 1977).

3.3.1 The concept of agency

Is Thompson's theoretical approach coherent, and how far does it inform his own writing? There has been voluminous discussion of Thompson's work, and much of this literature can be found referenced in a recent *Festschrift* to Thompson (Kaye and McClelland 1990). There is scope here only to discuss the main issues. Much of the critical attention has focussed on Thompson's concepts of 'experience' and 'agency', and the balance of agency and structure in particular in *The Making of the English Working Class.*

The term 'agency' is a problematic one in Thompson's work. As Anderson has noted (1980: 19-21), Thompson's definition of agency in his critique of Marxist determinism, *The Poverty of Theory*, is imprecise, and his uses of the word are irregular. In his review of Thompson's work, Anderson (1980: 19) defines agency as 'conscious, goal-directed activity', and has outlined a typology of human agency, differentiating between private, public and collective forms of agency. Private agency is the everyday carrying out of individual goals, 'which have consumed the greater part of human energy and persistence throughout recorded time.' Public agency occurs where 'will and action.... acquire an independent historical significance as causal sequences in their own right'. These public actions, such as political struggles or commercial explorations, have fitted into a known structural framework rather than attempting to change it. Collective agency is found in isolated 'collective projects which have sought to render their initiators authors of their collective mode of existence as a whole, in a conscious programme aimed at creating or

remodelling whole social structures.' As Anderson notes, Thompson's use of the term permits a 'sliding' between the different meanings of the term (ibid.: 21). Anderson's typology itself is perhaps too general, and ignores the interlocking nature of the types of agency he distinguishes, and the way in which the political and the personal mesh; in particular, it would appear to fail to give sufficient stress to the way in which 'private' agency can shape society. However, the typology forms a useful basis for general discussion.

In turn, Giddens , in a review of the debate between Thompson and his critics, has criticised Anderson's definition of agency, noting (1987: 215-6): 'Anderson confidently equates agency with 'conscious, goal-directed activity', finding only in the notion of 'goals' anything which merits serious analytical reflection. Such is surely not the case....'. For Giddens, agency 'presumes the capability of "acting otherwise" '. He goes on (ibid.: 216):

> Human beings have an understanding of themselves as agents, thus allowing for a reflexive appropriation of knowledge denied to non-human animals. They are also able conceptually to 'bracket' time and space, connecting future and past in a manner not open to the remainder of the animal kingdom. There is no reason to doubt that the behaviour of animal agents is purposive. But in the case of human agents purposiveness is integrated with a continuous monitoring of what the actor does, intrinsic to what 'doing' is.[5]

Giddens' definition is more comprehensive than that of Anderson, and Giddens' theory on how this reflexive form of agency is constrained by structure is discussed below, along with a discussion of the repercussions of Thompson's failure to adequately define agency.

3.3.2 The concept of experience

In *The Poverty of Theory*, Thompson (1978: 7-9) has criticised Althusser's theoretical stance for a failure to accommodate the category of experience, but while experience is another crucial term for Thompson (Kaye 1984: 174), it remains problematic. Thompson's use of experience is connected again to his opposition to economic determinism and the base-superstructure model. The experience of working people for Thomspon is inextricably linked to class consciousness. In the 1963 Preface to the *Making of the English Working Class* Thompson wrote (1986: 8-9):

> ....class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs. The class experience is largely

[5]Thompson makes a similar point in *The Poverty of Theory* (1978: 8).

> determined by the productive relations into which men are born - or enter involuntarily. ....If the experience appears as determined, class-consciousness does not. Consciousness of class arises in the same way in different times and places, but never in just the same way.

Here, as Sewell (1990; and see also Giddens 1987: 211) has pointed out, experience is seen as a mediating force between social being and social consciousness, and this is more explicit in *The Poverty of Theory*, where Thompson wrote later of himself and fellow Marxist historiographers (Thompson 1978: 170):

> We explored, both in theory and in practice, those junction-concepts (such as "need", "class", and "determine") by which, through the missing term, "experience", structure is transmuted into process, and the subject re-enters history.

As different critics have suggested (see Sewell 1990: 60; Giddens 1987: 211; Anderson 1980: 17), Thompson's use of this key word is imprecise. This is partly to do with the complex nature of the word. As Giddens notes (1987: 211): '....experience may refer to the subjective outlook of an individual participating in a given range of activities; or it may refer to what that individual actively learns from such participation.'[6] Thompson conflates the two meanings of the term experience given above, and fails to differentiate between different kinds of experience in the same way that different forms of agency remain undifferentiated in his work.

This perceived failure on the part of Thompson to define clearly key terms leads to further criticism of his studies. For example, the lack of clarity in the terms agency and experience means that its counterpart, structure, is not viewed through a clear optic. This leads to the following kind of imprecision, in *The Poverty of Theory* (1978: 171): '*La Structure* still dominates experience, but from that point her determinate influence is weak.' The point, however, when discussing the counterposition of agency and structure, should be not to discover which is weak or strong, but their *relative* strengths, and how they interact. A similar kind of criticism informs Anderson's suggestion that the main concentration of *The Making of the English Working Class* is on agency rather than structure: '....(there is) a disconcerting lack of objective coordinates as the narrative of class formation unfolds.' (Anderson 1980: 33). Missing for Anderson are analysis of structural elements such as capital accumulation and details of the workings of the cotton, iron and coal industries. He concludes (ibid.: 34-5):

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[6]Williams (1989: 126), on the other hand, gives the two main contemporary meanings of the word, focussing on different states or levels of consciousness: '(i) knowledge gathered from past events, whether by conscious observation or by consideration and reflection;....(ii) a particular kind of consciousness that can in some contexts be distinguished from 'reason' or 'knowledge'.'

> In the absence of any objective framework for laying down the overall pattern of capital accumulation in these years, there is little way of assessing the relative importance of one area of subjective experience within the English working class against another.

As Anderson comments (ibid.: 33), at the end of the book the reader is not aware of 'the approximate size of the English working class', and it is true that the reader does not receive a solid sense of how widespread the movements Thompson describes were.

As Giddens notes, however, while Thompson lays too little stress on structure, Anderson pays too little attention to agency, stressing as he does a more standard Marxist economic approach. As Giddens puts it (1987: 215):

> The debate between Thompson and Anderson carried echoes of long-standing controversies in the social sciences and history as a whole. Schools of social thought tend to divide around the question of agency. Those who, like Thompson, are prone to assert the primacy of agency typically have had considerable difficulty in coming to grips both conceptually and sibstantively with what might be termed the 'structural constraints' over human action. On the other hand, those traditions of thought that have tended to stress the significance of pre-given social institutions have for the most part generated seriously deficient accounts of action....[7]

Giddens own solution to the controversy can be found in his theory of 'structuration'. Briefly outlined, this involves considering a 'duality of structure' where (Giddens 1987: 61; and see Giddens 1986):

> ....structure is not as such external to human action, and is not identified solely with constraint. Structure is both the medium and the outcome of the human activities which it recursively organizes. Institutions, or large-scale societies, have structural properties in virtue of the continuity of the actions of their component members. But those members of society are only able to carry out their day-to-day activities in virtue of their capability of instantiating those structural properties.

While this proposed symmetrical relation between agency and structure is aesthetically satisfying, provides a theoretical framework for the consideration of the interaction of agency and structure, and has been recently lauded (for example, see Sewell 1990: 63-65), to operationalize this model taking into account all of the factors mentioned in the introduction to this chapter would be a daunting task. Giddens theory is useful in that it

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[7]The tension between agency and structure is also one area of enquiry that has been central to recent geographical theoretical analysis (see Johnston 1989; Kobayashi and Mackenzie 1989; Sayer 1989; Jackson and Smith 1984: 55-64; Gregory 1982, 1981, 1978; Ley 1980; Ley and Samuels 1978).

provides a *map* of processes within everyday life, given the whole of reality. Once any particular event is selected for study, however, the problem still remains as to what weight to give to individual circumstances, agents and structures. A further problem remains in terms of the scale or scope of a study. For example, Thompson's *Whigs and Hunters* is in many ways more satisfying than *The Making of the English Working Class* as far as the balance of agency and structure is concerned, in that careful attention is given to the formation of legal constraints on 'traditional' rights of the rural population. But *Whigs and Hunters* is a local study which lacks the scope and wide range of *The Making of the English Working Class*. And being a local study, *Whigs and Hunters* leaves itself open to the criticism that it neglects the international economy that was important to the maintenance of hegemony of the English landed classes (see Anderson 1980: chapter three).[8]

Given the difficulties of satisfactorily operationalizing Giddens' structuration model, and the major unresolved debates in the social sciences concerning the nature of agency, it may be necessary to accept that the problems outlined above concerning agency and structure are unlikely to easily resolved. In challenging the orthodoxies outlined in the Preface to *The Making of the English Working Class*, Thompson has perhaps gone too far in his stress on the possibilities of human agents shaping society and ignored important structural elements. However, looking at *The Making of the English Working Class* itself as a historical document, along with the work of other people's historians it remains important as a liberating influence for future academic enquiry, liberating in that individual and groups of people were returned to a history from which they had been expunged by Marxist and other determinist models.

With reference to the present study, the focus of people's history and Thompson's work, and the debates surrounding it concerning the agency of the poor, have directly influenced both the choice of subject matter and the approach taken in this thesis. In particular, the thesis aims to concentrate on the abilities and priorities of those who are

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8 Gregory's (1982) case study of changes in the Yorkshire woollen industry at the beginning of the nineteenth century attempts to put structuration theory to work. Gregory fails to show, however, how nineteenth century institutions and agents recursively re-constituted each other, and his case study fits more into the category of 'people's history', with its borrowings from Thompson (see ibid.: 9-14, 174-6, 239-40), rather than being an operationalisation of the structuration model. In *The Constitution of Society*, which contains a detailed discussion of structuration, Giddens does give three examples of empirical research that pass the 'structuration test' (Giddens 1986: chapter six). It is of note, however, that two of these studies do not use structuration theory. Giddens' himself qualifies the uses of structuration theory thus (ibid.: 326): 'The concepts of structuration theory, as with any competing theoretical perspective, should for many research purposes be regarded as sensitizing devices, nothing more.'

normally the objects of statistical enquiry, those who have become 'victims' of 'the enormous condescension of statistical analysis'. Also following people's history, and its analysis of the ways in which the poor and working classes can shape society, the thesis aims to recognise the various ways in which class struggle (or intra-village friction) manifest themselves, and at the same time to give due emphasis to the factors, both physical, institutional and ideological, which constrain the activity of the poor, and how the poor attempt to combat these or change them for their own advantage.[9]

3.4 Moral economy theory

Moral economy theory has been used by both 'political economists' and Marxist historians as a means of describing historical process and peasant action. The main elements of the theory in present use concern the penetration of capital into so-called 'traditional' societies, the subsequent erosion of 'patron-client' relations, and contestation between poor and rich over resources, 'traditional' rights, and ideology. This section will consider E.P. Thompson's concept of the moral economy, where poor and rich are seen as bound in a ring of mutual antagonism and need, and discuss some of the pitfalls of the moral economy approach as found in the work of James Scott.

Firstly, it should be noted that if too much stress is given to one of the key elements of moral economy, that is the penetration of capital into traditional societies, the subsequent characterization of the poor may be ambiguous or negative. Such is the case in the writings of Eric Wolf, one of the modern initiators of the theory. For Wolf peasants are basically passive, and react to the influence of the penetrating market (Wolf 1966: 16, 80-81. See also Wolf 1971: 264-265, 273). Resistance is undermined by peasants' short term and individual interests, and once resistance has failed, (ibid.: 108): 'Halted in their course and pushed back into their everyday concerns, therefore, peasants will quickly relapse into quiescence and passivity.' It is not difficult to see that an over emphasis on the effect of the penetration of capital can lead in moral economy theory to the kind of economic determinism discussed in chapter two, where the poor are simply economic pawns of international capital. Equally, stressing too strongly the role of the patron can establish

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9 There is no scope here to discuss the work of other British Marxist historians such as Christopher Hill and Eric Hobsbawm. For an assessment, see Kaye (1984). The output of these historians has been crucial in determining the approach of the school of Indian historiographers who form the Subaltern Studies group. For this literature see the six volumes of *Subaltern Studies* edited by Ranajit Guha, and well as Guha's text *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India.* It is of interest that critics of the Subaltern school have also focussed on the inability of its members to adequately locate the subaltern experience within the wider social structure (see Bailey 1988; Mukherjee 1988: 2110-12; O' Hanlon 1988: 200-292, 212).

their poor clients as merely passive recipients of elite support, as was seen in the discussion in chapter two of the 'political economists' writing on India.

Thompson's concept of moral economy is different. He discusses it in *The Making of the English Working Class* (1986: 68-73, 221-222, 233-241), and in detail in his essay 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century' (1971). In the latter, Thompson shows that peasants' protests and riots over state attempts to change their eating habits or set higher prices for grain were both ordered and had a clear intention - that of maintaining historic rights to subsistence.

For Thompson the poor were not deferent or passive until provoked, as in the accounts of Wolf and the 'political economists' discussed in the last chapter. Thompson sees the peasant protests he describes as part of a 'passionately held.... notion of the common-weal, and a struggle for maintenance of rights for the poor that could be dated back at least to the mid-seventeenth century.' (ibid.: 79, 98-100). Riot was often accompanied by threats to landowners and millers, and by political warnings. The relation between patrons and authorities, and the poor was not one where the authorities or the state acted on the poor. This is a crucial point to make. Rather, for Thompson, the interaction of patron and client was one of class struggle where the paternalist tradition was re-echoed loudly by the people so that 'the authorities were, in some measure, the prisoners of the people' (ibid.: 79). Thompson's notion of the moral economy therefore centres on contestation over resources and ideology, and it was through the experience of this struggle, as was seen above, that Thompson saw the working class in Britain making itself.

This concern with contestation over resources and ideology is elucidated in a further essay by Thompson, 'Eighteenth-century English society: class struggle without class?', where he considers the nature of patronage and class struggle. As noted above, struggle between poor and rich is seen by Thompson to involve struggle over ideology as well as over physical resources. Discussing cultural hegemony, Thompson comments (1978a: 163):

> But it is necessary to say what this hegemony does *not* entail. It does not entail any acceptance by the poor of the gentry's paternalism upon the gentry's own terms or in their approved self-image. The poor might be willing to award their deference to the gentry, but only for a price. The price was substantial. And the deference was often without the least illusion: it could be seen from below as being one part necessary self-preservation, one part the calculated extraction of whatever could be extracted. Seen in this way the poor imposed upon the rich some of the duties and functions of paternalism just as much as paternalism was in turn imposed upon them. Both parties to the equation were constrained within a common field-of-force.

This concept of a common field-of-force is a useful one for the consideration of power relations in contemporary West Bengal, where, as shall be seen in chapter seven, a similar pattern operates, and there is 'class struggle' prior to the formation of formal classes of a nature similar to that analysed by Thompson.

Some of the difficulties of applying moral economy theory to the analysis of contemporary peasant or agricultural societies can be seen in Scott's application of it to contemporary Malaysia in his book *Weapons of the Weak*. In this book Scott expresses a dissatisfaction with his and others' earlier writing which he viewed as dealing with peasant resistance in over-general terms. He concentrates instead on 'everyday forms of peasant resistance' in a village called Sedaka, which are outlined in the context of the village socio-economic structure and changes in the village moral economy caused by modernization of agricultural practices. This dual analysis of the modernization of agriculture and the activities of the poor is one that is paralleled in this thesis. Scott also reiterates that the writer on the peasantry should move away from: '....the stereotype of the peasantry, enshrined in both literature and history, as a class that alternates between long periods of abject passivity and brief, violent and futile expressions of rage....' (1985: 37), a stereotype found in the works of the political economists discussed in chapter two.

Following Thompson and other people's historians, Scott outlines the conflicting languages and ideologies used by the rich and poor in Sedaka (ibid.: chapters one and six), and he provides as well a wealth of material throughout the book on the viewpoints of the poor in their own language, including poor people's views of the rich. He also concentrates on other areas of 'routine' resistance and livelihood strategies such as gleaning, foot dragging, boycott of landlords by labourers, petty theft, gossip and gift-giving and extraction (ibid.: chapter seven), which he shows are informal areas of village conflict and subsistence techniques of the poor.

This analysis of everyday resistance has developed from the ideas of Wolf (1966: 86) on formal and informal village sanctions such as gossip in peasant communities, and of Hobsbawm (1973: 13), who suggests that peasant passivity can be a form of class struggle.[10] Scott's analysis shows that, as suggested above, Anderson's definition of 'private' agency needs to be expanded to include the ways in which so-called private agency is 'political' and can shape the wider political arena.

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[10] See also Shanin (1971a); and Guha (1986c: chapter six), for the place of gossip and rumour in peasant resistance in colonial India.

However, it is in examining village socio-economic structure that contradictions arise in Scott's analysis. In outlining agricultural modernization in Sedaka, Scott outlines what he sees as the erosion of the traditional village moral economy, and the loss by the poor of access to former 'rights' such as employment possibilities, gleaning, a mid-day meal, and gifts (ibid.: 110-124). To differentiate the village, Scott estimates per capita income for each of its 74 households. He then ranks the households from poorest to richest and categorises them by source of income as labourer, tenant, owner or landlord (ibid.: 92-94). The moral economy argument however rests on a differentiation of the village into two groups - wage labourers and landlords, or clients and patrons, the relationship between whom is seen to form the dominant village network (ibid.: 110-124). However, as Scott describes the changes taking place in the village economy, he constantly blurs the distinctions between the four categories he has produced from his household list, and also makes assertions that do not fit the pattern of differentiation into the groups of clients and patrons. The 'poor' are described as the poorest 37 households, that is half the village, and the rich the richest 25 households, an arbitrary division which is changed again arbitrarily when Scott discusses the 'wealthiest fifteen households' later in the text (ibid.: 140, 203). Despite the differentiation executed, Scott discusses 'modest peasants', 'a fairly well off tenant', 'well to do villagers', and 'relatively well off villagers' (ibid.: 167, 173, 179, 194). A villager who is the seventh poorest on Scott's list later becomes a 'modest tenant'. The idea of a client-patron relationship as the dominant village structure is complicated by middle peasantry, faction fighting, absentee landlords and kinship (ibid.: 70, 216-220, 165-166, and 106). This analysis therefore supports Giddens' comments above as to the difficulties of analysts of agency coming to grips with the structural constraints on human action.

3.5 Understanding poor people's priorities and knowledge

Scott's work is part of a wider movement within development studies, influenced directly or indirectly by people's history theory, that focusses on the perspective and abilities of the poor. This section will review relevant literature on participation, rural development, and from South Asia, that presents such a focus, examining as well how such literature has attempted to incorporate discussion of socio-economic structure.

Concentrating on the abilities and perspective of the poor is important for at least two reasons, one practical and one theoretical. Firstly, at a practical level it can enlarge the currently narrow focus on income or nutritional intake of the poor which are at present standard indicators of poverty. The problems with such a narrow focus were discussed in the last chapter with reference to articles on poverty in India by Jodha (1989) and Chambers (1988). This is a necessary corrective if the continued focus on poverty is to be

on indicators of poverty. However, as will be argued in chapter seven, future work on poverty could productively examine not only indicators of poverty (even those of poor people themselves) but also the abilities and capabilities of poor people (as well as structural constraints on these). This also connects to the theoretical importance of concentrating on the abilities of the poor. Simply put, as was seen in the last chapter, theories of poverty, and policies to deal with poverty, are to a large extent dependent on views held of the characteristics of poor people. For example, policy makers are unlikely to formulate participatory development programmes if they think the poor are incapable of participating. Views of characteristics of the poor need to be either supported or challenged by empirical evidence, and this is one of the purposes of this thesis.

3.5.1 Participation theory and rural development

Midgley (1986) has traced the antecedents of community participation to populism, and in particular the shared view that (ibid.: 16):

> As in populism, current community participation theory suggests that ordinary people have been exploited by politicians and bureaucrats and that they have been excluded not only from political affairs but from the development process in general.

There have been a range of publications on participation, and debate has been influenced by characteristics of the poor stressed by different authors. Midgley criticizes paternalistic publications such as those by the United Nations which 'generally take the view that poor communities have little potential for participation' because of the 'apathy' and 'indifference' of the poor. He quotes other studies that have shown poor people to be capable, and able to undertake co-operative projects without any external assistance (ibid.: 28-29).

As Midgley suggests, proponents of community participation have consistently attacked the 'top-down' approaches of conventional community development (ibid.: 35). Suggestions for replacement of top-down approaches vary, from those advocating an 'empowerment' of the poor (Cernea 1985; Blaikie et al 1979: 41-43), to those suggesting a partnership of the state and the poor (Lewis 1988; Korten 1987). The rhetoric of participatory development can be similar to that of people's history, for example in the following stress on the poor as 'social actors' (Cernea 1985: 10):

> Putting people first in development projects means giving people more opportunities to participate effectively in development activities. It means empowering people to mobilize their own capacities, be social actors rather than passive subjects, manage their resources, make decisions and control the activities that affect their lives.

The rhetoric here however is revealing; there is a suggestion that unless the poor are empowered, put first, or mobilized by outsiders, they will remain as 'passive subjects'. Indigenous forms of organization or participation by the poor, such as agricultural labour bargaining for pre-harvest or pre-transplanting wages, are generally ignored in discussions of participatory development. Similarly, literature on participation is often ahistorical, ignoring organization by the poor in the past. In addition, participation theory often does not examine closely local political and social differentiation and the make-up of local communities. As Midgley has noted (1986: 25), many writers on community participation fail to 'recognize that deprived communities are not homogenous and that inequalities of one kind or another characterize most forms of social organization'. Again, Giddens' comment on the difficulties of outlining constraining socio-economic structure while detailing agency are appropriate.

Of note in the recent literature on rural development that has focussed on the abilities of the peasant and the poor is the work of Paul Richards and Robert Chambers. Paul Richards discussion of 'people's science' (1979: 35) draws its theoretical framework from populist ideology, a coherent approach as populism has been concerned historically with the experience of the common person who has not benefitted from bureaucracies and governments (Midgley 1986: 15-16).[11] Richards' main concern is not with the political or social aspects of agrarian populism, but with the ecological aspects of the populist case (1985: 17). He has developed populist arguments of the following kind (ibid.: 16-17):

> Whereas much of Africa's rural population is scattered and poor it is also inventively self-reliant. ....inventive self-reliance is one of Africa's most precious resources. Development initiatives should aim to maximize the utilization of this resource.

Richards gives in *Indigenous Agricultural Revolution* a number of examples of inventive farmer techniques in West Africa, and in his second book, *Coping with Hunger*, describes how Sierra Leone farmers adapt their farming practices to exploit the local environment and cope with seasonal risk (Richards 1986). His work gives ample evidence of the coping abilities of farmers.

There is a shift here from some literature on participatory development; rather than participating in state development programmes, the emphasis in Richards' work is on the state supporting farmers' own strategies, and this is an important theoretical distinction to

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[11]Populism has been used as a perjorative term particularly by Marxists who view populists as being insufficiently concerned with analysis of class (see for example Byres 1979).For a discussion of 'supply side' and 'demand side' populism, see Richards (1987).

make. This emphasis is part of a wider view that aims to develop indigenous technical knowledge with external support (Biggs and Clay 1981; IDS 1979).

While Richards considers farmer knowledge and farmer agency as central issues, does he adequately detail the socio-economic context of that knowledge? In the Sierra Leone village he describes in *Coping with Hunger*, a moral economy framework is postulated with patron-client relationships as its most important factor (1986: 48-49, 115-116). One reason given for the support of this system within the village is the high degree of household mobility, which means that a patron may be a client in the not too far off future (ibid.: 130). In the pre-harvest lean season: 'Households short of rice expect to be able to borrow from households with a surplus', but: 'Rice loans to ward off pre-harvest hunger are not necessarily seen by those who take them as unduly "exploitative".' (ibid.: 115, 116). There is an echo of E.P. Thompson's ideas in Richards' comment that (ibid.: 49): 'Poorer villagers ....expect (*even demand*) that those with a little wealth or good fortune should begin to act as patrons.' (My emphasis). However, Richards gives little data to support his claims concerning loans and patronage. One wonders how far the local government officers, traders and literate men he describes as powerful patrons (ibid.: 53, 113) control village life, and whether their positions are, as might be expected, permanent ones. There is in the book no breakdown of village socio-economic structure or patterns of mobility, no details, for example, of the amount of land operated or yields per household, which would have allowed for a detailed discussion of these matters.

In a number of publications Robert Chambers has written of the need for rural development practitioners concerned with poverty to change their attitudes and consider poor people's perceptions of poverty, and priorities (for example, Chambers 1983: 141, 146). Chambers notes that learning from the poor and empirical research may change attitudes towards the poor, (such as those discussed in chapter two of this thesis) (ibid.: 103):

> Outsiders' comfortable views of the poor as improvident, lazy, fatalistic, stupid and responsible for their poverty, are reassuring but wrong. Case studies show that poor rural people are usually tough, hard-working, ingenious and resilient.

A concentration on poor people's priorities requires a widening of the definition of poverty to include those priorities, as discussed with reference to Chambers' work in the last chapter. Chambers has also attempted to differentiate poverty from vulnerability, the former concerning income, and the latter being closer to poor people's ideas of deprivation, and which Chambers defines as (1989: 1): '....not lack or want, but defencelessness, insecurity, and exposure to risk, shocks and stress.... vulnerability, and

its opposite, security, stand out as recurrent concerns of poor people which professional definitions of poverty overlook.'[12]

Chambers has outlined a useful typology to describe what he calls 'integrated rural poverty', a deprivation trap that includes poverty, isolation, powerlessness, vulnerability and physical weakness (1983: chapter five). Chambers concentrates on vulnerability and 'poverty ratchets' (ibid.: 114-130), and powerlessness (ibid.: 131-137). But while poor people's priorities are likely to include a focus on power relations, analysis or change of power or class relations, or socio-economic factors constraining the agency of the poor, remains problematic. As Chambers has remarked (1983: 60):

> The gravest neglect in analysis for practical rural development has been political feasibility ....the ignoring of power and interests of local elites, more perhaps than any other factor, has been responsible for failures to benefit the poor.

Related to this, Chambers raises the question of who will take the consequences of development action. If professional 'outsiders' intervene in an unequal social structure, this may lead to a backlash against the poor by indigenous elites. There is consequently in Chambers' work an ambivalence about power not found in the historical works discussed above. The type of agency that Chambers is interested in therefore tends to be 'private' (as defined by Anderson) - everyday and individual, or peacefully collective. From this point of view, Chambers suggests looking for programmes that will either benefit both rural elites and the poor, or not harm the elites (ibid.: 162), and for 'soft spots' or 'weak links in a chain' in village society (ibid.: 157), a concentration on which will allow benefits to reach the poor without instigating a backlash against them (ibid.: 145-146, 193). One of the main foci of the field work of this thesis has been just such an analysis of the means by which poor people negotiate for themselves a better quality of life, although the discussion of the field work findings below extends Chambers discussion by concentrating on relations of power and poor people's passive and active resistance to exploitation.

The ambivalence about power in Chambers' work can lead to a view of the agency of the poor as severely constrained. For example, Chambers has written (ibid.: 2-3):

> But who should act? The poorer rural people, it is said, must help themselves; but this, trapped as they are, they often cannot do. The initiative, in enabling them better to help themselves, lies with outsiders who have more power and resources and most of whom are neither rural nor poor.

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[12]Chambers' differentiation between poverty and vulnerability is essentially that between poverty and deprivation oulined by Veit-Wilson (1987).

Similarly, Chambers (1981: 5) has noted that for the poor: 'The knowldege that there will be future seasonal crisis constrains them [the poor] to keep on good terms with their patrons. They are thus screwed down seasonally into subordinate and dependent relationships in which they are open to exploitation.' This is perhaps a simplification of the way in which socio-economic structures and the poor interact, and the different forms of agency open to poor people. While poor people are certainly exploited or 'screwed down', this does not necessarily make them deferrent or subordinate, as the discussion of Thompson's and Scott's work above has shown, and as will be seen further in chapter seven. Chambers' concentration on the relationship between the poor and the rural development practitioner tends to ignore historical examples of poor people's passive and active resistance to exploitation. This should not detract, however, from the importance of Chambers' contribution and its insistence of putting the poor, and the poor person's experience, first.

3.5.2 Studies of the perspective of the poor from South Asia

This section will briefly review literature based on detailed field work from contemporary South Asia that specifically sets out to consider the perspective of the poor, in order to contextualize my own findings at field level, and to attempt to find common themes in this literature.[13]

On the sociological side, of note is Breman's study of changing labour relations and migration in Gujarat (1985b; 1979). Breman's work is the only major longitudional study from India I have come across that specifically sets out to examine the condition of the poor within local power structures. Breman's work looks specifically at changes in the material condition of the poor and the development of different forms of expolitation, and also reports on how the poor experience these changes. Another excellent case study is Jodha's work on poor people's perceptions of poverty in village Rajasthan, discussed in the last chapter (Jodha 1989). B. Harriss (1987: 14) has sounded a cautionary note with reference to Jodha's findings, commenting: 'That peoples' own criteria do not include longer life, less disease, more freedom for women makes one sceptical about gender bias in this phenomenological approach.' Such a criticism does not invaldiate the phenomenolgical approach, however, but it should make advocates of such an approach more sensitive to possible bias.

Mencher's research in Tamil Nadu on Untouchables' rejection of Brahminic ideology is also of note, as it is a rare account of the view of the power structure of the exploited

[13]For a general review of literature on poverty in India, including phenomenolgical studies, see B. Harriss (1987). Literature considering the abilities of the poor is reviewed in chapter seven.

(Mencher 1980, 1975). The account by the Jefferies and Lyon (1989) of gender roles, child bearing and patriachal ideology in Uttar Pradesh is a vital account of the complex nature of female oppression, much of it in the villagers' own words. Details of grass roots organization among Untouchables and women can also be found in Joshi (1986), and Kishwar and Vanita (1984).

Important research can also be found from Bangladesh, in particular BRAC's account of peasant perceptions of famine (BRAC, 1979); in Chen's and Yunus' description of the formation of credit and employment groups among poor women, with, again, much of the account being in the women's words (Chen, 1983; Yunus, 1982). In addition, Hartmann and Boyce's (1983) investigation of village life in Bangladesh remains one of the most vivid, sympathetic and powerful of village studies (in particular, the account of the death of a landless labourer, chapter 12).

Oral history remains another important method for representing the viewpoint of the poor, but apart from the work of Freeman (1979), and studies concerning poor people's uprisings (Stree Shakti Sanghatana 1989; Cooper 1984) no significant work appears to have been carried out in this area.[14]

What can one learn from this scattered evidence concerning poor people's priorities and how they experience poverty? Firstly, with the exception of Breman's work, which uses a moral economy framework, the literature cited above is for the most part descriptive, and lacks a theoretical base. Secondly, it is clear from this literature that poor people do not always subscribe to the dominant Brahminic or other ideologies. Rather, they assert their own identities, identities which are usually closely tied to the material circumstances of deprivation and exploitation in which they find themselves. Thirdly, poor people feel symapthy for and identify with their fellow poor, and help other poor people where this is possible.[15] There is a common note here with nineteenth century authors on poverty in Britain, who commented (often with astonishment) at how poor people support each other despite their own brutal poverty (see Booth 1988: 11; Rowntree 1922: 70; Mayhew 1971: 33. For references to South Asia see chapter seven). Of course there are converse findings which show how Untouchables or others have internalised dominant ideologies or do not

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[14]Fiction can also be a powerful method of portraying the lives and views of the poor. Bengali literature is rich in short stories and novels concerning poverty where villagers are thje main protagonists (see for example Bardhan, 1990) Representation of the experience of the poor can also be found in Marathi literature and songs (Omvedt 1977; Miller and Pramode 1972).

[15]This does not mean that there are no divisions among the poor (fostered by indigenous elites or otherwise), or that they do not compete with each other, as Breman's studies makes clear.

support each other (Bandyopadhyay and von Eschen 1988; Moffat 1979), but these go against the general trend of the general literature. The literature discussed in this section shows that concentrating on the viewpoint of the poor can be an important theoretical and practical corrective to unsubstantiated opinions of the poor such as those discussed in the last chapter, and the areas of the assertion of identity and mutual support will be seen to figure prominently in the discussion of findings on mutual support groups and ideology from the field in chapter seven.

3.6 Conclusions

This chapter has discussed literature that has challenged the representation of the poor person as 'economic man', a narrow and passive recipient of external interference from the environment, state or local elite; as such, it also challenges the approach of the literature discussed in chapter two. All of the literature in this chapter was seen, to a lesser or greater extent, to share a common focus and a common rhetoric - that is putting the experience and priorities of the poor first and describing, within its constraining social framework, the dimension of human agency. It thus all forms part of a wider theoretical debate about the nature and capabilities of poor people and their place in society. This theoretical approach links directly to policy, a policy of a type which involves recognition of the capabilities of the poor and their role in shaping society and its institutions.

Where the literature reviewed in this chapter has explained the causes of poverty, these are not seen to be located in the characteristics of the individual, but rather in the breakdown of traditional economies through the penetration of capital, or because of exploitation; that is, in structural socio-economic features. Much of the literature reviewed has tended to stress agency over structure, or to deal insufficiently with structure, and is subject to the kind of criticisms made by Giddens concerning studies of agency and structure. However, to address the interaction of various forms of agency and structure remains a complex challenge, as the review has shown.

From the discussion in this chapter and chapter two it is possible to suggest a theoretical framework in which the field data can be located. Essential to an analysis of poverty and survival strategies is a consideration of agency and structure. The poor should be seen neither as 'free agents' whose moral or physical failings make them responsible for their own poverty, nor as 'economic man' whose actions are determined by market forces or the state. Rather the interaction of agency and structure, and the mutual binding of the poor and the rich, should be investigated empirically in specific circumstances, and their relative degrees set out. It is to this endeavour that the thesis now turns.

CHAPTER FOUR
West Bengal - the case study area

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will give background and context to the case study area, examining the structural conditions that ensure the production of poverty in the state of West Bengal. Section 4.2 discusses geographical, agricultural and demographic features of Bengal and West Bengal.[1] Section 4.3 considers historical and political features, concentrating on the formation of social structure, the historical process of immiserisation, and protest by rural groups in Bengal in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Section 4.4 examines contemporary agrarian structure and politics in West Bengal. A further contextualizing introduction to the two case study districts, 24 Parganas and Midnapore, can be found in Appendix 4.1.

An examination of the history of the state shows how complex socio-economic structures have developed in West Bengal. In this chapter I will concentrate in particular on factors which constrain activity by the poor, and how village resources are controlled by a small group which is dominant politically and economically.

4.2 Geography, agriculture and population in Bengal and West Bengal

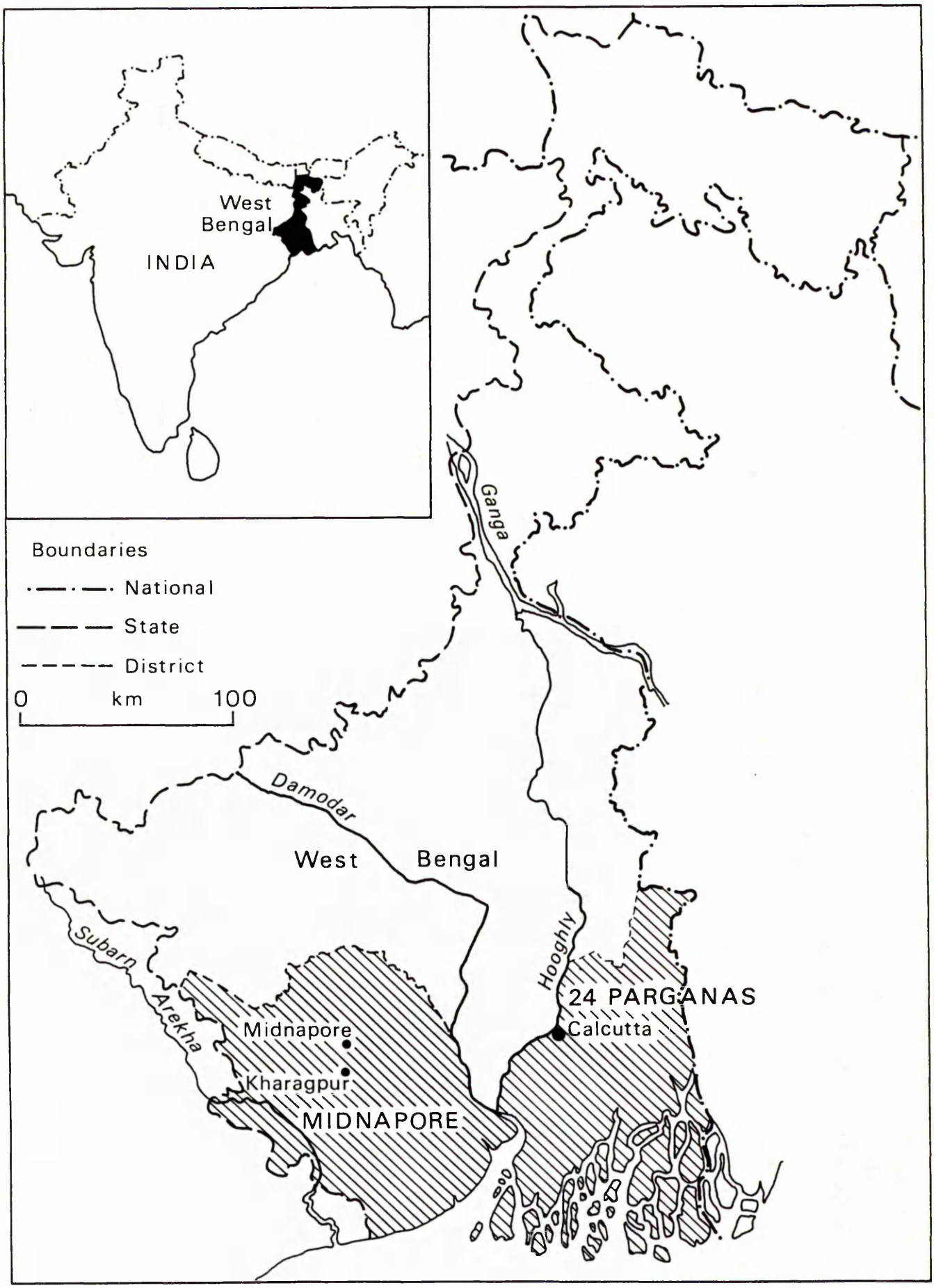
The State of West Bengal is 87, 853 sq. kms. in size, about half the size of England and Wales, and is situated between 21-27 degrees north and 85-89 degrees east (see Map 4.1). Some other relevant, self-explanatory figures are given in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Statistical profile of West Bengal - 1981

% of pop. in rural areas	74
% labour force in agriculture	55
Per capita annual income (US $)	139
Life expectancy (all India)	51
Female literacy (%)	30.3
Male literacy (%)	50.5
Overall literacy (%)	41
Pop. scheduled tribes (millions)	3.07
Pop. scheduled castes (millions)	12

Sources: Boyce 1987: 2; Government of West Bengal 1986

[1] 'Bengal' in this thesis should be taken to mean present day West Bengal and Bangladesh.



Map 4.1 Location of the Study Area

Modern West Bengal can be divided into two main geographical areas, the Gangetic delta to the south, and Himalayan West Bengal to the north, and it is in the former that the case study area lies. The changing course of the river systems of the region since the seventeenth century, towards present day Bangladesh to the east, combined with human intervention with drainage in the nineteenth century, has meant that most of the West Bengal portion of the Gangetic delta now makes up a moribund area of old alluvium (Bose 1986: 37), which will be termed here the 'moribund delta' or simply 'delta'. To the west of the moribund delta soils are more laterite, but are exchanged for alluvium as one moves eastwards (Mitra 1953: 128).

Rainfall in the delta region averages around 1500 millimetres a year, as compared to about 250-500 millimetres for semi-arid areas to the west of India (Jose 1984: 138). The water table is generally at a uniform depth throughout the delta, except in parts of its western boundary (Mitra 1953: 129). There are three principal cropping seasons in West Bengal. The most important agriculturally is the monsoon season, when mainly rainfed *aman* rice is grown, and which lasts from May/July to November/December. After this comes the winter *rabi* season, from December to about April, during which a variety of irrigated crops are grown, including *boro* rice, wheat, vegetables, oilseeds and pulses. Completing the agricultural year is the *bhadoi* or spring season, when the main crops are *aus* rice and jute. The state *aman* paddy yield in 1988 was some 6,127,000 tonnes, and the *boro* paddy yield some two and a half million tonnes. By contrast, production of wheat was some 655,000 tonnes (Palmer-Jones 1989: 24). During the *bhadoi* and late monsoon seasons traditional varieties of rice are generally grown, dependent on region, but it is on the *boro* season that this thesis concentrates, when the varieties used are almost exclusively 'high yielding' or 'modern'.[2]

Despite relatively high rainfall and some of the world's most fertile soil (Boyce 1987: 3), yields in West Bengal are low by south Indian and international standards. Average yield of rice is currently some 1.4 metric tonnes per hectare, only 17% higher than in 1928-1932 in Bengal (ibid.: 1,10). Cooper (1984: 97 fn 49) has estimated that yields decreased by 50% from 1917 to 1947.

Bengal and West Bengal have for several decades supported high population densities. From 1901 to 1931 population growth was generally low, with a decline in 1911 to 1921 caused by malaria and influenza epidemics. The high mortality after the

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[2]More detailed description of agricultural operations can be found in chapter six.

1943 famine slowed the increase of the 1930's, and growth was again high in the 1950's and 1960's (Boyce 1987: 139). Table 4.2 gives population growth and density from 1951 to 1981. Population growth at 2.46% per annum in West Bengal during this period can be compared to the figure of 2.15% per annum for all-India (Jose 1984: 140).

Table 4.2 Decennial growth of population in West Bengal - 1951 to 1981

Year	Population (000s)	Density per sq. km.
1951	26,300	296
1961	34,926	394
1971	44,312	499
1981	54,485	614

Source: Adapted from Jose (1984: 140)

This contemporary figure of 614 persons per sq. km. is one of the highest in the world. Bandyopadhyay (1983: 17) notes that West Bengal has a net sown area of roughly 13.6 million acres and a rural population of about 40 million, or an average of one third of an acre a person, some three times lower than the all-India average. Such high and steadily increasing population density has meant a decrease in land-related resources per person, and this is one constraining factor on the poor, and a cause of immiseration.[3] Van Schendel and Faraizi (1984: 111-112) have noted that in the nineteenth century high fertility was a peasant strategy to counteract: '....new developments in the siphoning-off of the surplus (the peasants) produced....'. By this century, as the same authors (ibid.) suggest, this strategy had got out of hand, in that households were now forced by poverty to higher reproductive rates. Increase in population should not, however, be isolated from other socio-economic and structural causes of poverty, discussed below.

4.3 Historical and political background to Bengal and West Bengal

Bengal has therefore been a region with a relatively large population and high agricultural potential, but which has developed into one of the poorer regions of India (Rogers et al 1989: 4). Van Schendel and Faraizi (1984) have charted the serious decline in living standards of the Bengal labourer between the 1880's and 1980's. This

[3]One should be careful about making a simple connection between agricultural growth and population growth, as some economists have done (e.g. Jose 1984: 138). Boyce (1987: 153), opposing Malthusian theory, has argued that population growth is positively correlated to agricultural growth in Bengal.

section considers factors other than population increase that have contributed to this decline.

4.3.1 History of the agrarian structure

The state of the agrarian structure in pre-British Bengal is open to dispute. Ray (1979: 1-3) has criticized a prevailing argument that pre-British Bengal was a pre-capitalist, self-sufficient and egalitarian society with no landless villagers, a view held by Mukherjee (1971: 230; 1957: 21) among others.[4] Rather, Ray suggests that (1979:1): 'Rural society on the eve of British occupation was a complex society in a comparatively advanced state of evolution.' According to Ray (1979: 71):

> Many of the characteristic features of the nineteenth century agrarian scene in Bengal could be detected in eighteenth century rural society: a considerable market for export and import of commodities, a relatively high degree of monetization, rural credit supplied by money-lenders, brisk sale of property rights in land....

Ray (1979: 270) noted the existence of landless labourers in the eighteenth century, and also argued (ibid.: 284-5) that one effect of the Permanent Settlement[5] was to increase the power of a small land holding rural elite, known as *jotedars* , who were able to continue through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries their previous exploitative relations with fellow villagers. Ray's thesis has been challenged by Bose as lacking geographical specificity. Instead, Bose (1986: 9-30) delineates for Bengal for the early twentieth century three forms of agrarian structure, which he locates in three geographical areas: the frontier regions of Bengal; east Bengal (now Bangladesh); and west Bengal, which roughly corresponds to the moribund delta. According to Bose, the agrarian structure in west Bengal was one consisting of peasant smallholdings and landless labourers. Bose comments on west Bengal at the beginning of the twentieth century (ibid.: 29-30):

> It was only in the Contai and Tamluk sub-division of Midnapur that there were not large reserves of landless agricultural labour....elsewhere in west Bengal ....the Bagdis, Bauris, and tribal people supplied much of the labour on the agricultural lands ....(these labourers) constituted a distinct landless element....

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[4]For contemporary versions of this argument see Boyce (1987: 5) and Greenough (1982: 13).

[5]Under the Permanent Settlement of 1793, the British administration attempted to vest ownership rights to land with what they considered would be an agriculturally progressive group of revenue collecting landlords (or *zamindars*).

The contemporary agrarian structure in the moribund delta, outlined below and in the case study villages, with its high proportion of agricultural labourers and multiple small holdings, and the importance of rural credit (Bose: 125-134, 144), was already set therefore by the beginning of the twentieth century, and can possibly be traced back to the eighteenth century.

Bose has charted the decline in living standards in west Bengal from the beginning of the twentieth century to independence, a decline also described by Greenough (1982: 70-84) in terms of nutritional intake from 1880 to 1940, and at village level between the 1920's and 1940's by Mukherjee (1971: 192-195). Reasons for this decline at the national and international levels concerned terms of trade and geography. Bengal's increasing integration into the world market meant that external and internal terms of trade worked against the agrarian sector concerning the price of jute, the main export crop, and also of rice (Bose 1986: 63-68). Bose (ibid.: 44) has also described the deteriorating physical environment in the western moribund delta in the nineteenth century: 'In west Bengal, as the river system atrophied.... disease and decline set in, and the population languished.' This natural atrophying of the river system, along with the construction of rail and road embankments from the middle of the nineteenth century, 'played havoc with the fast deteriorating drainage system of the region.' (ibid.: 44-45).[6] This led to decreasing soil fertility and stagnating yields, and along with the increase in population and pressure on land, as seen above, was a prologue to the famine of 1943 in Bengal and its aftermath, when up to three million people died. While the famine did have specific local causes, including maladministration and siphoning off of food from the rural economy (Greenough 1982; Sen 1982), the general economic decline from the beginning of the century also contributed to its occurence.

4.3.2 Political protests by rural groups

Declining living standards and exploitation were met with protest by Bengali labourers, peasants and sharecroppers.[7] Guha (1986c) outlines some of these protests from the nineteenth century, including the Santal (tribal) uprisings in Birbhum District in 1855. He also describes protest in 24 Parganas District in 1830 to 1832, of particular interest as it centered on Barasat, a large town about 12 kilometres from the main study village of this thesis. It was led by Titu Mir, a convert to the Islamic Wahabi

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[6]For a more detailed analysis of nineteenth century ecological developments, see Biswas (1981).

[7]This is not to limit peasant action to a response to economic decline or market penetration. Poor people's contemporary conceptions of justice are discussed in chapter seven.

sect, a professional fighter and *lathial* turned rebel. Titu Mir began to preach Wahabi doctrines secretly in Barasat from 1827, and violence against Hindus began in 1830 to 1831. O'Malley (1914: 49) noted that the Wahabis set up headquarters in 24 Parganas in 1931 'within a few hours' ride from Calcutta', and 'the whole of the country north and east of Calcutta, including the 24 Parganas, Nadia and Faridpur, lay at the mercy of insurgent bands, between three and four thousand strong.' O'Malley treats the uprising as communal disturbance. Guha on the other hand sees the insurgency as a 'sustained class struggle' of Muslim tenants against Hindu *zamindars* (1986c: 107-108). Elements of the agrarian structure which led to this Muslim-Hindu/tenant-landlord conflict were still present in the contemporary case study area, and this is discussed in chapter six.[8]

For Midnapore, the other case study district of this thesis, Dasgupta (1985) has outlined the exploitation of tribals in terms of expropriation of land and restrictions on forest 'rights' from 1760 to 1924. The incursion of outsiders, mainly Hindu and British landowners, was seen by the tribals as an affront to their way of living and particularly their honour. As Dasgupta puts it (ibid.: 117): '....the notion of honour figured very prominently in adivasi (tribal) consciousness'. As to the relative importance to tribals of food and self respect, another area of enquiry in this thesis (see chapter seven), Dasgupta notes (ibid.: 120):

> During the 1886 famine in Chota Nagpur, British officials found to their astonishment that starving Santals refused to eat the food distributed by the relief committee because it had been cooked by the hated Brahmins.

The most widespread of rural protests was the *Tebhaga* movement, which took place throughout Bengal in 1946 and 1947, although concentrated in the east and frontier regions. *Tebagha* was a movement carried out mainly by sharecroppers, for two thirds rather than the traditional half share of the crop from the land they farmed. Rather than being a purely economic protest, it was also a protest against the exploitative relationship between sharecroppers and landlords (Cooper 1984: 85). The movement also had wider goals, and 'land to the tiller' was a frequent demand. Sharecroppers were ringed in by a set of petty prohibitions which symbolised their low status. These included: being forced to sit on the ground or on a lower seat than a landlord; violence by the landlord's hired personal armies; and sexual and economic exploitation of women in the sharecropping households (ibid.: 89-92; see also Dasgupta 1984a: A5). The system of advances of pre-harvest credit in cash or kind to

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[8]Evidence of widespread Wahabi protest against the Government of Bengal in the 1860s, including in 24 Parganas, can be found in Khan (1961: 8, 320).

sharecroppers, to be repaid with extortionate interest or by labour after the harvest, which operated in the 1940s in Bengal (Cooper 1984: 89-92), was found to be still in operation in 1989 in the field study villages.

By November 1946 *Tebhaga* protests had extended to most districts in Bengal, and were taken up all over 24 Parganas in December 1946. Protests included attacks on landlords' granaries, and violence against landlords and the police. Agricultural labourers were actively involved, and it was women who took the lead in many incidents (Cooper 1984: 227, 233-236, 238, 307, 310, 359; Dasgupta 1984a: A6; Ghatak 1983: 124, 130-132). Dasgupta has noted (1984a: A6) that Tebhaga meant that: '....the social relationship around sharecropping could no longer be the same after the movement.... (and the sharecropper) was no longer willing to be tied to the "dhoti" strings of the patron-client relationship.'

There has been, therefore, a long history of protest against exploitation and the decline of living standards in Bengal, by tribals, sharecroppers and 'middle' peasants, which should counter any idea of the rural population in Bengal as passive.[9] These protests have continued after independence, particularly, as in the past, in frontier regions such as north Bengal (see Bandyopadhyay 1977), and during the recent Naxalite movement (Bannerjee 1984), which was mainly a tribal agitation. There have no doubt also been many local protests by agricultural labourers of the sort described by Davis (1983: 202-209) and Westergaard (1986: 74), which have gone unrecorded, as agricultural labourer protest in general has not been well documented in Bengal (Van Schendel and Faraizi 1984: 98).

Rural protests have been one important factor, as Dasgupta has suggested (1984a: A6), in shaping subsequent government legislation in favour of poorer peasants; for example, the *Tebhaga* movement led directly to the West Bengal Bargadars Act of 1950 (Ghosh 1986: 6; see section 4.5.1). This collective form of poor rural people's agency and protest against exploitation and decline in living standards should be borne in mind when present day forms of exploitation and agency are considered in chapter seven. They are also examples of the way in which poor people's 'public' and 'collective' agency (in Anderson's typology) is meshed and interacts with the structures imposed by the state and local elites.

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[9]For an all-Bengal perspective on peasant protest between 1928 and 1934, see Sarkar (1987). Sarkar also documents the active role played by women in peasant protests.

4.4 The agrarian structure in West Bengal

4.4.1 Background and agrarian structure

At Indian independence in 1947 Bengal was partitioned into West Bengal and present day Bangladesh, a division impractical in terms of communications and the functioning of the important jute industry (Boyce 1987: 6). Eastern India, including West Bengal, has remained since independence a region where low agricultural growth and poverty have coincided (Chambers 1988: 44; Vaidyanathan 1987: 2259). Meso-level data suggests that consumption of food in West Bengal stagnated and private consumption of non-food items showed a mild improvement between 1972-3 and 1985-6, while public services such as education and transport have remained poor, and rural housing conditions have deteriorated (Bhattacharya et al 1987a, b, c). Boyce (1987: 81) estimated that: '....the overall rate of agricultural output growth in West Bengal from 1949 to 1980 has been below the rates of rural and total population increase.' With stagnating yields and only 40% of net sown area irrigated in 1978-79 (as opposed to 78% in Punjab, Eastern Waters Study 1989: 63; Boyce 1987: 16), West Bengal remains one of India's poorest states in terms of macro-level economic indicators.

Lack of agricultural growth is one constraining feature on activity by the poor. Agrarian structure is a further possible constraining feature, and the development of this structure has been described above. The differential position of contemporary agrarian groups in West Bengal is generally analysed at state level in terms of ownership or operation of land. This is insufficient for an understanding of the rural economy as it takes no account of agrarian relations, land quality or position, access to irrigation facilities or other forms of infrastructure such as credit.[10] Macro-level indicators are also too gross, and a category such as the National Sample Survey's '1 - 2.5 acres' for operation of land is inadequate to differentiate the complex land use system found in West Bengal. The problems arising from using such gross categories in what is essentially a 'minifundist' agrarian economy are described further is chapter six.

Despite these inadequacies, some conclusions can be drawn from state-level data. These are given in Tables 4.3, using the most often quoted and up-to-date figures to describe land operation in the state.

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[10]Patnaik (1988) makes a similar point.

Table 4.3 Operational distribution of land (percentages) in acres, West Bengal, 1953/4 to 1970/1 (a)

Size of holding (acres)	1953/4 i	1953/4 ii	1960/1 i	1960/1 ii	1970/1 i	1970/1 ii
0.00	48.5)	-	33.9	-	31	-
0.01-1.0	.....)	3.3	12.7	2.3	20	4
1.0-2.5	16.2	10.5	16.9	11.6	22	21
2.5-5.0	17.5	22.6	19.6	28.0	16	29
5.0-7.5	8.0	18.6	9.1	21.5	6	20
7.5-10.0	4.1	13.2	3.2	10.8	3	11
> 10.0	5.2	31.8	4.5	25.8	2	15

(a) Figures have been rounded.
i = % of households
ii = % of area operated

Source: Adapted from Ghose (1983: 103)

The Table shows a high and historically increasing percentage of households operating marginal holdings under 2.5 acres, and also inequality of holdings with 11% of households operating above five acres in 1970-71, but operating 46% of total land; as well as a very small percentage of households operating over 10 acres of land. This Table supports Sengupta's statement (1981: A71):

> ....in pre-reform (i.e. pre-1977) West Bengal we already observe, compared to the whole of the country, a much higher preponderance of small and marginal farmers and farms, a higher incidence of share-croppers and agricultural labourers.... and a relatively weak existence of big landowners at the other pole of the economy.

Further evidence concerning the post-independence agrarian structure is available from eleven randomly selected micro- and meso-level studies of West Bengal, details of which can be found in Appendix 4.2. These studies classify rural households by ownership of land by class (Table A4.1), and land ownership alone (Table A4.2). Despite regional variations, the idiosyncratic nature of classification, and the fact that all the authors cited refer to land ownership rather than land operation, these micro- and meso-level studies support the information given in Table 4.3 by showing a high preponderance of landless and poor farmers, around 70% of the rural population in Table A4.1, with a similar percentage of households owning less than one acre in Table A4.2. At the same time, the data presented in the Appendix supports the macro-level evidence by showing land ownership skewed in favour of those owning more than one hectare and particularly more than two hectares, the 'middle to rich' farmers of Table

A4.1. While few 'big landowners' exist in West Bengal, it is the group of 'middle' farmers who have been seen by various authors as dominant in the villages of West Bengal (Webster 1989: 45; Bandyopadhyay and Von Eschen 1988: 127; Kohli 1987: 100-101; Bandyopadhyay 1983: 61, 63, 73).[11]

The large percentage of smallholdings found below 2.5 acres is complemented by a high degree of fragmentation or disarticulation of holdings, a matter of great importance at village level. Boyce (1987: 210) has calculated that in 1970/71, for all size classes of rural households, there were 7 fragments of land per holding and 5.6 fragments per acre, and this figure becomes more telling as only 0.07% of holdings in West Bengal were operated on a joint basis in the same years (Ghose 1983: 131 fn43).

4.4.2 Increase in the numbers of agricultural labourers

These figures on land operation are complemented by data on the increase in the number of agricultural labourers. Historically, agricultural labourers have been amongst the poorest occupational groups in Bengal, and the group most affected by the general decline in living standards (Van Schendel and Faraizi 1984). Agricultural labourer households were found to be the main group among the poorest households selected for intensive interviews in all three case study villages in this thesis, and hence the further discussion of them here.

Estimates of the degree of increase in the numbers of agricultural labourers vary, according to the population used, as can be seen in table 4.4.

[11]Nossiter (1988: 120-1) has written that, as opposed to north India, in West Bengal there has not been a tendency for one middle or lower caste to dominate, and that, unlike most other parts of India, caste has not been a major axis of conflict.

Table 4.4 Increase in the numbers of agricultural labourers, Bengal and West Bengal, 19O1 to 1981

Year	%(a)**	%(b)	%(c)	%(d)	Year
1901	13.6			26	1901
1921	15.9				1921
1941	26.3				1941
1951*	25.9	21.4	19		1951*
1961	28.2		20.2		1961
1971	44.3	44.4	35	33	1971
1981			33		1981

* 1951 to 1981 = West Bengal, except for (d), which = Bengal
** Sources (a) and (b) give agricultural labourers as a percentage of agricultural workers. Sources (c) and (d) give agricultural labourers as a percentage of all rural workers.

Sources: (a) Ghose 1983: 101 (b) Boyce 1987: 225 (c) Dasgupta 1984c: A 141 (d) Van Schendel and Faraizi 1984: 10, 45

According to all sources, the percentage of agricultural labourers has increased steadily, at least since 1951. Dasgupta (1984c: 133-136) traces this increase to the nineteenth century, and he gives as reasons: the influx to the state of large numbers of tribals and 'semi-tribals' who worked in plantations in north Bengal or clearing frontier regions; that part of the peasantry was forced to give up land because they were unable to pay debts; and the displacement of rural artisans from traditional occupations. Possibilities of rural employment did not increase with the number of agricultural labourers, which meant a move from a labour scarce to a land scarce situation. Lack of access to employment and land has therefore been a further cause of the immiserisation of the Bengal poor.

4.4.3 Tenancy, absentee landlordism and credit

The tables above do not cover three features of agrarian relations that make the agrarian structure 'move'. These are tenancy, absentee landlordism, and credit relations, which will be seen in operation at micro-level in chapters six and seven.

As well as a high degree of landlessness and a high percentage of agricultural labourers or 'peasant proletariat', the rural economy is marked by tenancy relations. The main form of tenancy in West Bengal is sharecropping. Dasgupta (1984a: A2) suggests that sharecropping grew up after the Bengal famine of 1770 for similar reasons to the increase in agricultural labourers. About 23% of land was sharecropped

in west Bengal in 1931, and about 31% in 1951 (Cooper 1984: 342-345), declining to about 19% in 1971/2 (Boyce 1987: 214).

The importance of sharecropping led Bhaduri (1973) to postulate a 'semi-feudal' model for the West Bengal rural economy (and particularly Birbhum District). In essence, Bhaduri suggested that the agrarian economy was controlled by a small number of large landlords who, by taking a large share of the crop from their sharecroppers, and by lending at high rates of interest, kept the latter, who had no alternative source of credit, in a state of permanent indebtedness and subordination. These landowners were seen to hinder agricultural production by not investing in agriculture, a policy that would supposedly maintain the status quo.

This model has been amended by Harriss (1984) who has suggested however that in modern day Birbhum (ibid.: 25): '....the essence of 'semi-feudalism' persists and is reflected in the prominence of usury, in various forms, and speculative trading.' The model has also been criticized on empirical grounds in a number of papers. Rudra (1975a: 1052) and Khasnabis and Chakravarty (1982: A30-31) have shown that in many parts of West Bengal landlords are not the main source of credit, and Bardhan and Rudra (1978: 375) have concluded, from an analysis of data collected from 110 villages, that 45% of landlords giving loans did so without interest. Rudra (1975b) and Bardhan and Rudra (1980b: 1943) also point out that a significant number of hirers of labour are not larger landowners but smaller farmers and tenants, also a finding of Kohli (1987: 119), Dasgupta (1984b: A90) and Bandopadhyay (1983: 32).[12] All of these empirical findings point to the complex and multistranded nature of the rural economy, and the difficulties of imposing on it a model such as Bhaduri's. It is certainly not an economy where a large mass of undifferentiated labourers or sharecroppers face a small dominant landlord class, but rather one where different power groups overlap, even though power is increasingly found in the hands of 'middle' farmers.

The second complicating feature of the relations of production is that evidence suggests that a 'substantial' proportion of land in West Bengal is controlled by absentee landlords (Dasgupta 1984b: A94). 'Absentee' is defined here to mean landowners who live outside the village, and who earn their primary source of income in some way other than agriculture (i.e. they are not agriculturalists nor do they supervise agricultural operations). Nossiter (1988: 116) has noted that many Bengali *bhadraloks* were urban rent receivers who retained a rural connection through land ownership. Ghose (1983:

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[12]See also Bardhan and Rudra (1980a), and Rudra (1975a).

103-104) also mentions the historical acquisition of land by non-agriculturalists, for example during the 1943 Bengal famine. Empirical evidence of a significant degree of absentee landlordism can be found in Khasnabis and Chakravarty's survey of 140 landlord households in Nadia District (1982: A-22), where 20 out of 71 lessors of land were absentee; from Kohli's survey of 300 sharecropper households in 24 Parganas, Birbhum and Midnapore Districts (1987: 130), which shows that 81% of those giving land for sharecropping lived outside the village; and from Westergaard's survey in Birbhum (1986: 47) which estimates that more than half the land owned by one study village belonged to outsiders.[13] Kohli (1987: 100) has noted that the Government of West Bengal has declared absentee landlords 'enemies' of the rural people, as they do not participate in agricultural activities.

The third factor which fuels the agrarian economy is credit and market relations. As B. Harriss (1982: 195) has noted in a study of the system of circulation of rice in Birbhum District:

> Rice mills stand dominant over the rural economy. Though their land ownership is sizeable, ...profits are extracted through usury, through rent on property and land, through buying and selling, usually accompanied by processing.

This 'extraction of surplus' from and control of the rural economy goes hand in hand with a similar extraction at village level involving control of credit by employers and petty traders. J. Harriss, in a complementary study to the one just quoted, has written (1984: 26-7):

> ....while the system of advances [of credit to landless people and smallholding peasants from rich peasants/landlords] does not necessarily constitute a powerful siphon of extraction of product, it certainly secures the appropriate surplus for speculative trading by the dominant class.

This 'dominant class' in Birbhum District is also described by Harriss as 'middle farmers' (ibid.), that same group that I suggest control village relations in West Bengal in the moribund delta. Systematic discussion of the wider market and its relation to the village economy (of the sort carried out by J. Harriss 1984, and B. Harriss 1982) are beyond the scope of this thesis, although the thesis does discuss access to capital and credit in chapters six and seven.

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[13]For further evidence see also Webster (1989: 18); Bandyopadhyay (1983); B. Harriss (1982); Frankel (1971: 168); and my field work (chapter six).

4.5 Politics and agrarian reform in West Bengal

State reform may have significant impact on the lives of the poor either by its presence or absence. The effect of agrarian reforms and the benefits the poor have gained is charted below, after a discussion of macro- and micro-level politics in the state.

Apart from two brief interrupted periods of Left Front (Communist) rule between 1967 and 1970, the post-independence government in West Bengal was before 1977 exclusively Congress. Since 1977 West Bengal has been ruled by a Left Front coalition, of which the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM has been the main partner. The long history of peasant protest in the state has been seen as one reason for the success of left wing parties (Bandyopahdyay 1983: 111). The Left Front is now dominant politically in West Bengal, having gained 85% of seats in the state parliament in 1987 (with 53% of the vote, an increase of 7% over 1977). Equally the Left Front have a stronghold in the *panchayats* , which the Left Front re-constituted in 1978, and which have successfully consolidated rural power for the party. Table 4.5 gives Left Front successes in the 1978, 1983 and 1988 *panchayat* elections.

Table 4.5 Votes to the Left Front in the 1978,1983 and 1988 *panchayat* elections in West Bengal

Administrative Level	% of seats won 1978	1983	1988
Village	67	58	73
Block	74	65	79
District	87	74	92

Sources: Webster (1989: 36); Kohli (1987: 1O9)

The Left Front have benefitted from party discipline and strong leadership at state level (Kohli 1987: 98). Despite rhetoric to the contrary (see Government of West Bengal 1986: 1; Rudra 1985), the Left Front has been more in the liberal-democratic than in the socialist mode, and has taken a more moderate path in its agrarian reform than, for example, governments in Kerala (Webster 1989: 42; Kohli 1987: 99-101; Westergaard 1986: 7; Bandyopadhyay 1983: 45-48, 145-148). This has partly to do with the federal situation in India where opposition states have been consistently 'toppled' by the Central government. As important, given the Kerala comparison, has been the internal agrarian structure in West Bengal, and the need for the Left Front to retain its power base among the middle land operators.

Since 1978 *panchayats* have been in control of land reform and rural development programmes, and increasingly resources are being chanelled through the *panchayats* . In order to describe which groups hold political power in West Bengal at village level, it is necessary to look at membership of the *panchayat* organisations. Evidence from throughout the state, including my own field work, suggests that the *panchayats* at village level are controlled mainly by small to middle land operators who already have significant resources under their control, with a large percentage being teachers or other professionals (see Nesmith 1990; Mallick 1988: 86-7; Nossiter 1988: 141; Kohli 1987: 103, 111; Westergaard 1986: 73, 85; Ghose 1983: 115). For example, Kohli found that of 415 heads of village *panchayats* in Midnapore district, 217 were teachers (1987: 111), and Ghose that, in 1979, sharecroppers and landless labourers made up 6.6% of village *panchayat* members (ibid. :115). Against the grain, Lieten (1988) found that, for Birbhum District, scheduled tribe and caste members were increasingly represented on village *panchayats*, as opposed to women, whose representation was more or less non-existent. The bulk of the evidence suggests that it is the small to middle land operators who have control over the 'panchayats', at least at village level. These peasants are supporters of the CPM, and hence the 'concessions' made to this group in terms of subsidies on irrigation water rates, exemption from land revenue payments, and subsidised supplies of fertilizer (Dasgupta 1984b: A91; see also Sengupta 1981, and chapter six). As Kohli has concisely put it:

> ....the CPM leadership finds it difficult to balance the needs of the middle peasantry, who often employ landless labourers, against the task of organizing the struggles of landless laborers for wage increments.

How far landless labourers have benefitted from Left Front rule is now discussed in more detail.

4.5.1 Agrarian reform - benefits to sharecroppers and landless labourers

Bandyopadhyay (1983: 12-15) has described important post-1947 agrarian reforms in West Bengal, in particular the 1950 Bargadars Act legislating that sharecroppers should receive 60% of crop share, which led to widespread eviction of sharecroppers, and the 1953 West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act (WBEAA) which aimed at eliminating intermediaries and restricting landholdings. The latter was the equivalent of acts abolishing zamindari 'rights' throughout India, and led in West Bengal as in India to large scale evasion of land ceilings by transfers of land to non-land holding family members (ibid.: 12; Ladejinsky 1972). A 1971 amendment to the WBEAA augmented the share of sharecroppers from 60:40 to 75:25.

The main agrarian reform attempted by the Left Front has been as follows (Government of West Bengal 1986: 2):

> The first object of land reforms programme (sic) is to reduce, as far as possible the disparity and irregularities in the rural economic structure by bringing about a change in the ownership of land and land tenancy system. With this end in view a comprehensive multi-purpose programme has been undertaken to distribute surplus lands among the landless and to safeguard the rights of the sharecroppers.

Most academic attention has focussed on the attempt to 'safeguard the rights of sharecroppers', one of the state's poorer occupational groups. How far has this been a success? Since 1978 the government has attempted to register the names of sharecroppers to prevent their eviction and ensure their continued right to cultivate land they have farmed for three consecutive years; and to provide these sharecroppers with credit, other institutional support, and a lawful (75%) share of the crop. This programme has been called 'Operation Barga'. According to the West Bengal Government (1986: 3), before 1977 only 300,000 sharecroppers had registered their names with the land revenue office, while by the beginning of 1986 about 1.4 million had done so, out of a total of about two million sharecroppers in the state.

Critics of the Left Front Government have pointed out that the attempts to increase sharecropper registration have led to political infighting at the village level and double registration (Rudra 1985: A68; Bandyopadhyay 1983: 127, 166; George 1982: 98; Mukhopadhyay 1979: 1566). Dasgupta (1984b: A90) has opposed this view, preferring the term 'class struggle' to 'infighting'.

While there is some consensus as to the success of registration (Kohli 1987: 127; Westergaard 1986: 37, 49, 67), registration may mean nothing more that having one's name recorded (see Kohli 1987: 125). It would be difficult to say how many sharecroppers have resisted eviction after registration, or even if eviction has decreased since the 1970's. My own field work suggests that, as after the 1950 Bargadars Act, landowners are now much more reluctant to rent out land (for registration in the case study villages see chapter six; see also Dasgupta 1984b: A90-91).

There is some consensus that the Left Front has been unable to provide credit for registered sharecroppers (Westergaard 1986: 36-37,50; Bandyopadhyay 1983: 33; Rudra 1981a: A64; Sengupta 1981: A74; Choudhury 1980: 2172-2173; Chattopahdyay

1979: 2024). There is a similar consensus that the share of the crop is still divided illegally in the landowners' favour (Bandyopadhyay 1983: 55-6, 65).

While 'Operation Barga' has been successful in some areas, it awaits detailed contemporary state-wise assessment. Of more relevance to this thesis, given the constitution of the group of the poorest, is the relative rise in the numbers of agricultural labourers since independence, and the relative fall in the numbers of sharecroppers. This has meant that the Left Front's (and academics') concentration on the rights of sharecroppers has been to the partial exclusion of a focus on the rights of agricultural labourers. There may be some overlap between the categories of sharecroppers and agricultural labourers, but they may also be groups with conflicting interests, for example over the price of rice where some sharecroppers would be sellers of rice and agricultural labourers buyers.

The steady historical increase in the numbers of agricutural labourers between 1951 and 1981 has been outlined above. In contrast, over the post-independence period, sharecropping has been in decline, probably because landowners have turned from leasing out land to cultivation with hired labourers (Dasgupta 1984b: A93). Bandyopadyay (1983: 38-39) gives figures for primary occupation for 1981 of 95 agricultural labourers and 42 sharecroppers per thousand population.

Numerically, therefore, there are twice as many agricultural labourers as sharecroppers. How successful have the Left Front policies been in supporting agricultural labourers? Macro-level figures for land re-distribution have been analysed by Bandyopadhyay (1983: 23).[14] Of the 1.25 million acres of surplus land (i.e. land above the land ceiling) vested in the government up to 1986, 813,000 acres had been distributed to 1.6 million beneficiaries, of which 55% had been given to Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes, an impressive performance (Govt. of West Bengal 1986: 3). A micro-level study by Westergaard (1986: 41, 80) suggests, however, that quality of land may be as important as quantity as far as land distribution is concerned, as distributed land may be uncultivable.[15]

The Left Front government does not appear to have prioritised the enforcement of a minimum wage for agricultural labourers (Kohli 1987:142; Westergaard 1986:6; Ghose

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[14]Bandyopadhyay comments that although a quarter of all surplus land in Indian had been vested in the Government of West Bengal, for reasons concerning types of land reform legislation only 12% of this land can be compared with other Indian states, so that the Government of West Bengal's performance 'cannot be considered as extraordinary'.
[15]This issue is considered in more detail in chapter six, Appendix 6.2.

1983: 120-1; Rudra 1981a: A63). Nor is it likely to do so in the future, given the nature of its support among 'middle' farmers who are wage payers. Wage rates in Bengal have remained steady but at a low level in the last hundred years (Van Schendel and Faraizi 1984: 66-8); and Mallick (1988: 180) has calculated that: '....there does not appear to be any significant differences in ratios of change between Congress and Communist regimes in terms of money or real wages.' There is some evidence, however, that agitation by labourers is becoming effective in increasing the wage rate (see Ghosh 1988: 884; Bardhan and Rudra 198Ob: 1948).

4.5.2 State sponsored rural development programmes

Programmes for rural development with a pro-poor focus undertaken by the Left Front Government have had mixed success, but have probably been no worse than those in other parts of India. Westergaard's study suggests that the National Rural Employment Programme has had considerable, if regional, success in providing employment for the rural poor (1986: 39, 51, 82). Chaudhuri's (1980) and Kohli's (1987: 137-138) studies of food for work in Birbhum, Burdwan and Midnapore districts accord the programme some success, and Dreze (1988: 71-2) also found that, for one village in Birbhum, and despite party bias, the Integrated Rural Development Programme in West Bengal 'overwhelmingly benefitted landless labourers'. The most thorough independent survey of rural development programmes has been carried out by Ghatak, who found that in Purulia and Bankura Districts, for the Rural Labour Employment Guarantee Programme (1985: 78):

> There is more concern at all levels, beginning from the State, down to the Gram Panchayat, in getting more resources, somehow or the other, than in their proper utilization....

And for the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas for the same districts Ghatak found that there had been a 'failure of the administration and Panchayat leadership' which meant that the performance of West Bengal had been 'miserably poor' (Ghatak n.d.: 40). These findings undermine Kohli's statement that (1987: 139):

> For the first time in modern India, political institutions capable of facilitating rural development with redistribution are being developed at the behest of the CPM leadership.

One last point should be made concerning the Left Front's agrarian policy. This is that, as a number of academics have pointed out (Lieten 1988: 2069-70; Bose and Bhadoria 1987; Kohli 1987: 129; Ghosh 1986: chapter four; S. Sengupta, personal communication), Left Front policies have had a significant effect concerning the

conscientisation of poorer groups. For example, as Ghosh suggests (1986: 78), for the first time, under the Operation Barga programme, government officials have been going to villages to meet sharecroppers at the sharecroppers' convenience, to discuss their rights with them. The Left Front programme cannot be judged, therefore, only in quantitative terms; that poor village people can now live, as one of Lieten's respondents put it (1988: 2070), with 'human dignity', as opposed to the situation ten years ago, is a significant achievement, one of relevance to the approach of this thesis, and also one of its field findings. For while political power may not be held by poorer groups, the Left Front's approach has meant that subaltern groups can now consider playing larger social and political roles.

4.6 Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn about the agrarian structure in West Bengal. Firstly, present day features of the rural economy, such as a high degree of landlessness and sharecropping, a high percentage of (mainly landless) agricultural labourers, and an exploitative rural credit system, have been in operation since at least the beginning of this century. Secondly, that a combination of high population growth, low agricultural growth and stagnating yields have, since the beginning of this century, led to increasing poverty in Bengal and West Bengal, and to a comparative scarcity of resources. This increase in population has taken place in the context of an unequal agrarian structure where a majority of resources, and control of local government, in the moribund delta at least, are now in the hands of a group of 'middle' farmers. Thirdly, present day West Bengal has an agrarian structure that is complex, and which defies easy categorisation. Complicating features are: overlapping groups of agricultural labourers, landless labourers, sharecroppers and small land operators, all of whom may have conflicting interests; ownership of small fragmented plots by a large number of smallholders; complex tenancy arrangements; absentee landlordism; and credit relations. It is within this unequal and complex structure, with increasing immiseration and poverty, and decreasing access to resources, that poor people must continue their livelihoods. A further constraint on the poorest has been that the Left Front government has forgone 'radical' attempts at reform because of fear of alienating 'middle' land operators, which has meant relative loss for agricultural labourers. However, while poorer groups may not have received significant material gains from land reform and rural development programmes, these gains have been of disproportionate psychological and qualitative importance. Many of the structural features outlined in this chapter will reappear when socio-economic structure in the case study villages is investigated in the next three chapters.

CHAPTER FIVE
Methodology, background to the study villages, and economic differentiation

5.1 Introduction

This chapter continues at village level the contextualization begun in chapter four. Section 5.2 on methodology describes how and why I came to carry out a field study, and the relation between theory and method in this thesis. Section 5.3 gives background information on the case study villages and makes comparisons between them and West Bengal. Section 5.4 sets out the method of categorization used in this thesis, after reviewing (in Appendix 5.3) past attempts at differentiation at village level, particularly that carried out by Marxist analysts. It goes on to describe, for each village and comparatively, four income groups and their characteristics, in order to outline the socio-economic structure of the villages.

5.2 Methodology

5.2.1 Choice of study areas, villages, and the gathering of data

Since 1981 I had been associated with an NGO working for rural development in north 24 Parganas District of West Bengal. For a year and a half from the beginning of 1984 I was employed as administrator by the NGO, and learnt Bengali during this time. Fonogram, the main study village, was the village adjacent to the NGO compound, and during my work with the NGO I had some, limited, contact with Fonogram villagers.[1] My experience of working with the poor, particularly women, in rural West Bengal, and admiration for their abilities led to my choice of thesis subject. This choice was further determined by the relative neglect of work specifically on poverty or poor people's abilities in research on rural India. A choice was also made specifically to focus on a subject that would include the priorities and perceptions of women. As Breman has suggested (1985b: 9): '....a systematic illumination from the bottom up has remained very rare.' Breman goes on, in a comment which connects to the discussion in chapter two (ibid.: 34):

> The distortion which results from analysing situations of poverty from outside often arises from incomprehension and appalling inability to empathise among researchers who allow themselves to be guided by the judgements of the higher social classes to which they belong.... It has become standard practice to point to defects in the lives of poor people as explanation for the situation in which they live. Only study at closer range

[1] All local names are pseudonyms.

> can contribute to the combating of the notion that poverty is perpetuated primarily by a subculture rather than by a larger social structure....

Such 'study at closer range' was the aim of this thesis, and from this quote it is possible to extrapolate again the methodological approach here - that both the world-view and abilities of the poor, and the social structure with which they interact, need to be studied if poverty is to be understood.

Fonogram seemed a sensible choice as a main study village, as accommodation could be provided in the compound of the NGO for which I had worked, and previous contact with the village and in the area could enable an approach to poorest households and local records that might be inaccessible to a total stranger. I also decided to select two other villages in a different ecological setting for comparative purposes, and to ensure that my sample of poorest households was sufficiently large to describe their activities in general terms.

The first period of fieldwork was a preliminary visit from December 1986 to March 1987. Several visits to five other villages, all within an hour's cycle ride from Fonogram, assured me that Fonogram was representative of at least its immediate locality, and reference to Census details suggested a more general representativeness. The Fonogram area, including the village, was badly flooded in the 1986 monsoon season, which offered the opportunity of concentrating on how poorest households had coped in a period of difficulty, and for some, crisis. An informal census survey of all the village households was initially made, collecting basic socio-economic data, with the assistance of Hamedchha - Fonogram villager, agricultural labourer aged about fifty, local guide, and an invaluable source of local information. After this survey Questionnaire 1 (see Appendix 5.1) was formulated. The aim of this Questionnaire was to get basic socio-economic data on each household, and to discover how common activities that are important to the poor were for the village as a whole. None of my 'assistants' spoke English, so all communication was in Bengali.

From the initial census survey, my knowledge of the village and the views of villagers, a 15% sample of 22 poorest households was selected for more detailed informal interview.[2] A staff member of the NGO for which I had worked assisted in these detailed interviews with poorest families. These interviews concentrated on how respondents had coped after the floods during the 1986 monsoon, a period still fresh in their minds. Their answers were grouped under common headings, and with these answers in mind a questionnaire was produced (Questionnaire 2, see Appendix 5.1), with questions listed

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[2]Subsequently, three more households were added in 1988/89, bringing the sample nearer to 20%. How poorest households were selected is outlined in more detail in chapter seven.

under the headings of 'Hunger, collection and survival', 'Economic experience', 'Social experience' and 'Political experience'. These subject areas aimed to reflect the priorities of poor people, and examine their survival strategies. Questionnaire 1 interviews will be referred to below as first round interviews, and Questionnaire 2 interviews as second round interviews. The formation of questionnaires after initial discussions with villagers allowed for greater flexibility in including questions concerning areas which respondents considered important.

During this field trip I also mapped land use through a plot to plot survey of about 600 plots, and recorded details of land ownership and land operation for Dabu *mouza* (or administrative area), and parts of the surrounding *mouzas* operated by Fonogram villagers, a process repeated in 1987/8 and 1988/9 (for *mouza* locations see Map 6.1). The aim of this was the evaluation of an irrigation project, which involved the introduction of fourteen shallow tube wells (STWs) into the Fonogram area in 1985, and which is discussed in chapter six. These details on land holding were checked against records kept in the local Land Revenue Office, which maintained records of land ownership for 1956;[3] I also noted the size of 600 relevant plots in this office. A random sample of 50 plots from the details gathered in the field on land operation was checked against the 1956 records, and in almost all cases the information corresponded, after accounting for inheritance or land sale. Details of land operation gathered were also checked with the local land surveyor. Figures given here on land operation in Fonogram can therefore be considered as accurate.

A second field trip was made from October 1987 to January 1988.[4] The intention on this trip was to carry out first and second round interviews in two villages in a different agro-ecological setting to Fonogram. Five villages in Birbhum District and four villages in Midnapore District where I had previous contacts were visited, in an attempt to choose secondary study villages. I returned to Fonogram and conducted second round interviews with 22 poorest households, most of whom were interviewed informally in the previous year. However, because of serious illness and difficulties in getting my research visa (which had been issued in London) in Calcutta, I returned to Britain.

This necessitated a third field trip, from October 1988 to February 1989, to complete the fieldwork. This third visit enabled the completion of a three year land use survey in Fonogram. For the secondary villages I chose Midnapore over Birbhum. There were

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[3]The land settlement for the Fonogram area following that for 1956 was completed in February 1989, and records of this were not available during the field work period.
[4]Because of research visa delays I went in October 1987 to Dhaka in Bangladesh to investigate the possibility of continuing research there. In November 1987 I heard my research visa had been granted and I travelled to West Bengal.

several reasons for this. Firstly, my wife was also undertaking research in Midnapore. With its laterite soil, central Midnapore provided a quite different agro-ecological setting to 24 Parganas or the more fertile areas of Birbhum that I had visited. It also gave access in close proximity to scheduled tribes and scheduled castes, supposedly the poorest and most oppressed groups in India, and, importantly, the possibility of an introduction to local villages through the West Bengal Forestry Department.[5] Midnapore also had a radical decentralisation programme in process during the fieldwork (see Bose and Bhaduaria 1987). As it turned out, visits planned to the villages concerned in this programme had to be cancelled for political reasons. I did, however, discuss the programme in detail in several meetings with its administrator, and the Midnapore *Zilla Parishad* chairman.

We set up house in Kharagpur town (see Map 4.1). Using Census data and after visiting several villages, two suitably sized and located research villages were selected where an introduction by an extension officer of the local Government Forest Office was possible, and because these villages had a large population of scheduled caste and tribal households to whom it appeared likely I would be able to talk. I cycled daily to these two villages, subsequently named Bithigram and Keshipur. First round interviews were carried out in both of the villages with the aid of an 'assistant'. Nineteen households in Bithigram and 16 households in Keshipur were then selected for re-interview on the basis of these first round interviews, that is approximately a 20% sample from each village. During the first round interviews, I was accompanied by a wealthy villager, but in the more detailed second round interviews only myself, my 'assistant' and poorest respondents were present.[6] During this trip first round interviews were also carried out for each household in Fonogram, to supplement and cross-check the basic socio-economic information gathered in 1986.

The approach taken in the second round interviews was to sit with poor people, privately and in their homes, and at a convenient time for them. After explaining in some detail the reasons why so many questions were to be asked, the questionnaire was administered giving the respondent as much scope for replying as possible, or of otherwise speaking their mind. This approach appeared to be the most suitable to find out the qualitiative information I wanted. It was a time-consuming and draining practice, as there was much unhappiness and anger in many of the respondents' lives, and these interviews could last for two hours or more; several respondents broke down in tears during the interviews. Mutual respect between respondent and interviewer was essential during

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[5]Mallick (1988: 229) estimates that scheduled tribes and castes make up 33% of the West Bengal population.

[6]In Bithigram for half of the second round interviews one of the poorest household members who acted as a guide was also present.

interviews. This respect made it possible for me to ask very personal questions about respondents' lives, and about emotional subjects such as death of family members.

Key informants in each village, some of whom were among the poorest, were another useful source of information, and being accompanied by a poor person (Hamdedchha) in Fonogram, and later in Bithigram, set me on more of an equal footing with poorest respondents. Informal chats along the roadside, in the local teashops, in my or others' houses in the evening with tea as a lubricant, often provided revealing information. Many of the most enjoyable and animated discussions took place in the evening. The daughter of one of the respondents in Fonogram, who lived in a dilapidated shack on the side of the approach road to the village, would often be cooking as I passed by. She was happy to chat and talk about her responsibility for cooking, and proved a source of inspiration about how, what and where poor people eat. I also held about twenty group interviews with both better off and poorer people; again the evenings were a good time for these. Interviews in the Lodha (tribal) *para* of Bithigram often turned into group interviews, which I welcomed. I interviewed as well, often in substantial depth, richer farmers and village leaders, to find out their views on the village and farming.

There was little 'random sampling', therefore, in the choice of study villages, although an attempt was made to ensure the representativeness of the villages by surveying them and checking Census details before selecting them. As will be seen below, I have no reason to believe that the study villages are unrepresentative of moribund delta West Bengal. A criteria for choice of villages as important as representativeness was ease of access to the poorest, as lack of such access has been one reason for past failure of rural surveys to address poverty.

5.2.2 Method and theory

At least two problems arise from a 'bottom-up', qualitative approach of the kind advocated here. The first concerns Sen's reference to 'mental-metricism', discussed in chapter two. Sen argues that individuals are too close to their personal construction of reality to have a clear picture of their state of well being. He gives the example of questions put to survivors of the 1943 famine in Bengal about their health. Of those replying, 48% of widowers thought that they were ill, as opposed to 2% of widows - obviously disproportionate figures. According to Sen, these widows' perceptions did not accord with reality (Sen 1985: 82-3). Using this reasoning and example Sen develops arguments about capability and the need to use macro-level indicators of well-being, therefore avoiding the idiosyncrasy of the individual's perception.

It may be true that everyone is tied in different ways by their individual perceptions. However, one example or even several examples should not be used to invalidate everything that a poor widow has to say. A sensitive researcher would understand from a knowledge of the social background and context that Bengali women may give particular answers to questions in an interview situation. For example, poor rural Bengali women may not be able to give their age correctly. This does not mean that they are unaware of who exploits them in the village, or how much food their family needs to eat, as shall be seen in chapter seven. It is up to the individual researcher to empathize sufficiently with the poor so that s/he can understand which comments by poor people are more likely to be closest to 'reality', as it is perceived by the researcher.

The second problem is that, even if poor people's views are considered as valid, and are understood in social context, can they be taken as representative? A possible solution is to use comparative analysis. For example, if a particular coping strategy is found to be widespread in rural studies, this strategy can then be taken as representative as long as the boundaries of this representativeness are clearly expressed. This method is used in chapter seven.

Method in this thesis is closely related to theory. Chapter two has shown that method and choice of subject are not 'value-neutral'. Historically, a quantitative approach to studying poverty has been likely to have a built in bias against poor people, to be elitist, and to involve both moral judgements about the poor, and regulatory policy. Equally, chapter three analysed studies which have taken a qualitative approach in pointing out the abilities of the poor, but have not always addressed structural socio-economic issues. Quantitative or statistical analysis appears inadequate to describe the 'informal economy' which poor people operate, but such analysis can usefully contextualize this informal economy by analysing village socio-economic structures. In this and the next two chapters, therefore, following the discussion in chapters two and three, I have attempted at micro-level to balance agency, or the coping strategies of the poorest, and structure, or the socio-economic framework with which the poorest interact. The attempt is not to give poor people's views unfettered by context, but neither to treat the poorest as incapable of effecting change in society or their own lives.

5.3 Background to the case study villages

This section gives background information on the three study villages in terms of location, population, caste, politics, occupation and land operation. More detailed analysis

of market linkages, farming practices, soil and topography for Fonogram can be found in chapter six. All figures in this section are for 1989, unless otherwise stated.[7]

The differences outlined below between Fonogram in 24 Parganas and the Midnapore villages will be seen to fit with the differentiation of pan-Indian 'A' (or agriculturally advanced) and 'B' (or less agriculturally advanced) villages set out by Dasgupta (1975). Inter alia, 'A' villages, of which Fonogram is one type, were larger, more accessible, more irrigated, with less equal landholding, more landless households and higher yielding land than B villages. All of these indicators will be seen to hold in the comparison between the villages here, suggesting that the agrarian structures described are representative of a wider pattern, although the general nature of Dasgupta's indicators will be questioned.

5.3.1 Fonogram

Fonogram village in north 24 Parganas District is the main study village (for a village and *mouza* map, see Map 6.1). It lay about 40 kms. from Calcutta, or three hours from that city by public transport. A metalled road, on which plied an irregular bus service, was located two kms. from the village. Fonogram was approached by a brick and earth road, which ended abruptly at the first house in the village. The village roads were all *kaccha* .

Fonogram lay within an area that was mainly agricultural. Agricultural practices had recently been modernized with the introduction of STWs. Soils were clayey loam, and typical of the surrounding area. Local villages, which were both Muslim and Hindu, bore a similar appearance to Fonogram, being mainly groups of mud walled and red tiled houses surrounded by a chess board of different sized fields in different states of cultivation throughout the year.

No evidence was available as to when Fonogram was founded, although older residents suggested that the area had been settled several generations back. The village was exclusively Muslim. Households were grouped into family settlements, with the better off households having inner courtyards, in traditional Muslim fashion. Pressure on village land was great. In 1989 there were 141 households in the village. Total village population was 843, or about 6 people per household. Fonogram households operated just under 50 hectares of land, giving a person-land (operated) ratio of 14 decimals per person, about 42% of the rural West Bengal average, as might be expected in this fertile area.[8] In 1951, the Government Census estimated Fonogram's population at 405, so the population more

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[7]For a background to the case study districts, see Appendix 4.1.

[8]See Table 5.1 below for comparative figures from the Midnapore villages and all-West Bengal.

than doubled over the last 30 years. Several villagers saw this increase in population as one historical cause of increasing poverty in the village; most villagers agreed that poverty of all but a few in the village was increasing.

Local health services included a hospital in Barasat (a town about 12 kms. from Fonogram, and the centre of Wahabi protest mentioned in chapter four), and two allopathic doctors in Dabu, a very small town about three kms. distant. Water supply in the village was from tubewells and ponds. None of the houses had electricity, although since the introduction of the STWs there had been one street light in operation on the road into the village. A market was held twice weekly at Dabu, and most Fonogram villagers shopped there or in local shops which lined the approach road to the village and whose proprietors, as will be seen, were among the main sources of village credit.

The majority of Fonogram villagers were supporters of the CPM, through choice or otherwise. As one wealthier farmer put it: "I used to be a supporter of Congress, but I thought that I would be beaten up if I continued to support them, so I changed to the CPM."

About half of Fonogram came under the jurisdiction of the local municipality, and the remainder under rural *panchayat* control. The reason for this, as informants told me with some amusement, given the rural nature of the village, was that a water pipe ran around its outskirts, and this pipe was the responsibility of the municipality. Romesh Ali[9], a Fonogram entrepreneur who had been instrumental in the introduction of the STWs, had contested municipal elections unsuccessfully. Fonogram therefore had no *panchayat* representative. Several villagers told me that because part of the village came under municipal authority, it did not qualify for government aid, unlike neighbouring villages. An interview with the village *panchayat* member of one of these neighbouring villages revealed that the local area was poorly covered by government schemes for the poor, as the *panchayat* member had not even heard of the large, government funded Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP). However, the STWs in Fonogram were half funded from the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), and IRDP comes within the DRDA heading.

Whatever its official position, Fonogram had an unelected 'committee' (to use the local term) made up of four men from the most powerful households in the village, including Romesh Ali. This committee called occasional meetings to discuss matters that affected the whole village, for example rates of payment for land leased during the *boro* season. The

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[9]All villagers' names are pseudonyms.

committee members had considerable influence concerning village affairs, and, among other actions, during my field work evicted two households that had supposedly been involved in immoral activities, as well as helping to settle a virtually homeless third household on a piece of land of an absentee landlord outside the village. Although there were some differences of interest between these four households, as became apparent when discussing village matters with them, it would not be going too far to say that village power was largely in their, and their close relatives', hands. They were the 'middle farmers' indicated in chapter four as the most powerful group in the moribund delta villages of West Bengal.

Fonogram farmers followed traditional cropping patterns (see Appendix 4.1). *Aman* , the most important crop, was poor to indifferent in the 1986, 1987 and 1988 seasons, because of flooding or insufficient rainfall. This increased economic pressure on all villagers, but particularly the poor as they lost out on employment at the harvesting period, the peak period of employment in the agricultural year.

5.3.2 Bithigram and Keshipur

The two secondary case study villages lay about 14 kms. south west of Kharagpur, a railhead and small town 225 kms. west of Calcutta (see Map 4.1). A metalled road but no bus service ran near the villages, so they were approachable from Kharagpur town by car, bicycle or foot, with some circumnavigation needed for the first method. Roads within the local villages were all *kaccha* . The area was mainly agricultural, although there was local employment connected to the railways.

The two villages lay in a transitional agricultural zone between the alluvial soils of eastern Midnapore and the laterite soils of the west. The area surrounding the villages, with its red barren soil, had a desolate feeling, especially compared to the cramped and fertile surroundings in Fonogram. There was much more space here, but less in it. In both villages, households operated about half each of *sali* (or paddy land) and *danga* (or high, poorer quality land with lateritic soil), confirming the position of the villages in a transitional zone (for details, see Appendix 5.2). As can be seen from Table 5.1, which gives details of population and land operated, the person-land ratio was considerably higher in Fonogram than the two Midnapore villages.

Table 5.1 Population and land operation in the three study villages

	No. of h.holds	No. of people	People/ h.hold	Area operated (hectares)	Decimals/ person (1)
Fonogram	141	843	6	49.7	14
Bithigram	97	5O2	5	92	45
Keshipur	57	299	5	48	39

(1) 1981 Census figures give a West Bengal average as 33 net sown decimals per rural person (Bandyopadhyay 1983: 17)

The Midnapore villages were much closer to the West Bengal average than Fonogram. Part of the reason for the lower person-land ratio in Bithigram and Keshipur was the poorer quality of land operated there. Average yields in Fonogram for *aman* paddy were 60 *maunds* a hectare, the equivalent in the Midnapore villages being 45 to 50 *maunds* . This fits with the typology formulated by Dasgupta (1975) for higher yields in 'A' villages. As well as this, about 90% of land owned by Fonogram households was double cropped, as opposed to 11% of land owned by Bithigram villagers and 13% of land owned by Keshipur villagers. The difference in soil quality must have been built into land measures by the colonial government for taxation purposes, as the Midnapore *bigha* at O.25 hectares is almost twice the 24 Parganas *bigha* at O.13 hectares.

Both of the Midnapore villages were made up of Hindu households. The most influential and numerous caste in Bithigram, with 58 of the 97 households, were Mahatos, a farming caste which was probably originally an aboriginal tribe who became caste Hindus (Bose 1986: 17; Ray 1979: 133). Most of the rest of the village was made up of Lodhas - that is, 36 households - an aboriginal and until 1952 a 'criminal tribe' which, according to Davis (1983: 55-6), came from western Midnapore and were displaced from 'forest living' by Hindus clearing land for farming, a common experience of tribals in India. These Lodhas were mainly agricultural labourers, and considered themselves Hindus, although they retained a separate cultural identity.[10] The Mahatos and Lodhas lived in spatially distinct *paras* (or living areas). It was the Mahatos from Bithigram and surrounding villages who were the main employers of the Lodhas. The exploitative relations between Mahatos and Lodhas is described below. Lodha houses tended to be very small, with no windows, as compared to some of the large houses of the better off Mahatos. It was

[10]For the history and culture of the Lodhas in Midnapore, see Bhowmick (1963).

several Mahato households, including the village leader (who came from the wealthiest household), who were the main centre of village power. The other three households in Bithigram came from the *narpit* or barber caste, a service caste who earnt their main sources of income from agricultural labour, although still acting as barbers within the village and receiving yearly payment in paddy for this.

The Bithigram village leader provided a brief history of the village. According to him, a nomad group called 'Kulfas', from whom both the Lodhas and Mahatos were descended, and who were shifting cultivators, had come to the local area about 150 years previously. These Kulfas paid tax to the local 'rajas'. After the 'rajas' came *zamindars* who sharecropped out land; the descendants of these *zamindars* were still powerful locally.

In Keshipur the dominant and most numerous caste were also Mahatos, with 36 households, while the remaining 21 households were Challuks, a scheduled caste group. The *panchayat* member from Keshipur related the village's history. He said that the original Keshigram villagers used to be inhabitants of Bithigram, but three families, including his own and two other powerful families in the present village, left Bithigram, which lay two kms. away, forty years previously. Keshipur consisted of a scheduled caste *para* and a Mahato *para*. Male Mahatos and Challuks mixed (and ate) together more freely in the village than women, who were more restricted by caste. There was no inter-caste marriage in either of the Midnapore villages.

Neither of the two villages had electricity, and the main source of water was tubewells and artesian wells. The nearest hospital was in Kharagpur, and the nearest allopathic doctor had a surgery in a village about one and a half hour's walk away. The nearest market was five kms. distant. The main sources of credit were the local shops and employers of labour, although there was in a nearby village a co-operative society which made loans to farmers.

Both Bithigram and Keshipur returned CPM candidates at the 1988 *panchayat* elections. The Bithigram village leader thought that 75% of his village supported the CPM, and the rest supported the Jharkhand party. The percentages were about the same in Keshipur.

Nine wealthier households in Bithigram had built bio-gas plants, taking loans of 5,500 rupees and receiving subsidies of 3,300 rupees under the IRDP scheme to do so. The village leader was the first villager to build such a plant. Six other villagers had taken loans under IRDP to buy livestock. In Keshipur five richer households had built bio-gas plants, and six households had taken other IRDP loans. A *gram sevak*, or government village

extension officer, made occasional, sporadic apprearances in Bithigram, but was not seen in Keshipur.

5.3.3 Land operation, employment and gender relations in the three study villages

Lower lying *sali* land in Keshipur and Bithigram was used for farming *aman* , which was the predominant and for many the only crop, although a handful of farmers in Bithigram had begun farming *boro* paddy and vegetables using low lift pumps to pump water out of a nearby canal branch. Farmers said that the low water table level would not allow profitable use of shallow or deep tube wells. *Danga* land was used for an *aus* crop, and for grazing of livestock, and may be the degraded upper slopes to which Kelly refers (see Appendix 4.1). More recently *danga* land had been used for growing eucalyptus under a government sponsored rural development programme. Appendix 5.2 gives further details of land operation in the Midnapore villages.

Details of land operation in the three villages, as compared to the West Bengal National Sample Survey (NSS) figures, are given in Table 5.2, using NSS categorisation.[11]

[11]The inadequacies of such gross categorization of land operation have been noted in chapter four. However, state-wise figures were not available in any other form.

Table 5.2 Land operation in the three case study villages (1988/89), and in West Bengal (1970 to 1971), by NSS categories

			% of households				
(Acres)	0	0.1-1	1-2.5	2.5-5	5-7.5	7.5-10	>10
NSS	30.9	19.8	22.4	15.8	6.5	2.5	2.1
Fonogram	43	29	18	6	4	-	-
Bithigram	2	32	37	19	5	2	3
Keshipur	7	25	41	19	7	1	-
			% of land operated				
(acres)	0	0.1-1	1-2.5	2.5-5	5-7.5	7.5-10	>10
NSS	-	4.3	20.5	29.0	20.0	11.0	15.2
Fonogram	-	17.5	34.0	21.4	27.1	-	-
Bithigram	-	6.7	26.8	28.7	13.3	8.2	16.3
Keshipur	-	7.7	31.9	32.6	21.0	6.8	-

Source for NSS figures: Ghose (1983: 103)

The village figures can be seen to correspond roughly to West Bengal data, but with some significant differences, which can be accounted for by the time differences between the two sets of figures, and the changes in the West Bengal agrarian economy between 1970 and 1989, outlined in chapter four. In particular the number of smallholdings and the amount of land in the hands of smallholders operating between 0.1 and 2.5 acres has increased since 1970. While none of the villages are 'typical', they can be considered sufficiently representative of West Bengal.

The figures reveal a correspondence with Dasgupta's 'A' and 'B' village typology described above, in that Fonogram had a larger number of landless, and more unequal landholdings, than the Midnapore villages. However, the difference between the three villages in the 0.1-2.5 acre category of operation is explained by the fact that almost no households in the Midnapore villages were landless, a consequence of the poorer quality and lower value of land in the locality which meant that even very poor households operated small amounts of *danga* land. The land reform programme of the government also meant households had moved from the landless to the O.1-1.O acre category in the Midnapore villages. Land was more equally operated in the Midnapore villages than Fonogram, with 10% of households with above 2.5 acres operating 48.5% of land in Fonogram, as opposed to 29% of households operating 66.5% in Bithigram and 27% of households operating 60.4% in Keshipur. The extreme degree of landlessness and

smallholding in Fonogram is apparent from 72% of households operating less than one acre.

Given the poorer quality of land, the Midnapore villages followed a similar pattern to Fonogram of a large number of 'landless' (or households with a small amount of poor quality land) and small operators. Land operation figures in the villages support the argument that rural resources are controlled by a select few.

Table 5.3 gives details of occupation for the three study villages.[12]

Table 5.3 Primary occupation in the three study villages by household, 1988-89 (1)

	No. Fonogram h/holds	No. Bithigram h/holds	No. of Keshipur h/holds
Agricultural labourers	60 (42)	43 (44)	16 (28)
Farmers	33 (24)	23 (24)	10 (18)
Lorry labourers	12 (9)	-	1 (2)
Petty trade	9 (6)	1 (1)	-
Railways	-	15 (16)	21 (36)
Contract labour (2)	-	8 (8)	7 (12)
Agricultural labourers (tied)	6 (4)	-	-
Factory	5 (3.5)	-	-
Van driver	5 (3.5)	-	-
Shopkeeper	2 (1)	-	-
Business	1 (1)	-	-
Miscellaneous (3)	8 (6)	7 (7)	2 (4)
Total	141 (100)	97 (100)	57 (100)

(1) Primary occupation here means the main source of income of all household members in combination. Figures for all West Bengal in 1981 for rural workers were 41% farmers, 33% agricultural labourers and 26% non-agricultural workers (Dasgupta 1984c: A141). Figures in brackets are percentages of households.
(2) Rock-digging, paid on a piece rate basis.
(3) Miscellaneous includes those gaining income from charity, as lorry drivers, maid servants, *imam* , mason's labour, sharecropping, cowherdering, teaching, and sale of bamboo

In total 70% of households in Fonogram and 68% of households in Bithigram depended on agriculture for their primary source of income, a figure similar to all-West Bengal, as

[12]The occupations noted in Table 5.2 are those concerned with paid employment; women's unpaid 'employment' in the household or elsewhere is discussed in chapter seven.

opposed to 46% in Keshipur.[13] For 36% per cent of Keshipur households and 15% of Bithigram households the primary source of income was railway work, in Kharagpur or along the railway tracks. Access to this source of employment was almost exclusively in the hands of the Mahatos. This employment was secure and paid relatively well, at 700-800 rupees a month, five to six times as much as an agricultural labourer might expect to earn in an average month. That this resource was captured by the higher castes shows that caste in the Midnapore villages related closely to household income.[14] This was also symbolically represented by the head of one of the richest households in Keshipur also being the temple priest. Equally in Fonogram it was wealthier villagers who carried out religious functions, and the *imam* came from one of the wealthiest households.

As opposed to this regular and well paid employment available to some Midnapore villagers, employment external to the village and agriculture in Fonogram, by which 30% of villagers gained their primary source of income, was mainly in the form of daily labour loading and unloading lorries, petty trading in local markets, in local factories, or by plying cycle vans. Despite Fonogram's proximity to Barasat and Calcutta, only two of its households (one of the poorest and one of the richest) worked in urban areas, the former as a petty trader and the latter in business.

Different forms of agricultural labour contracts existed in the two study areas, following their states of agricultural development. Wages for agricultural labourers at 14-15 rupees a day were higher than the 10-12 rupees paid in the Midnapore villages. An agricultural labourer would be expected to be employed for no more than 180-210 days in any of the villages, and probably less in the Mindapore ones. In Fonogram most employment for agricultural labourers was on a daily basis, and payment was by cash. In contrast in the agriculturally 'backward' Midnapore villages, labourers were often 'tied' to employers under *dadan* . This was a system whereby agricultural labourers took loans from employers in the pre-harvest lean period, and the loans were repaid by harvest work, usually at exploitative rates of pay at about half the market rate. This credit system was more exploitative than the one found in Fonogram, where most loans to the poor were from shopkeepers who charged 10% more per item bought on credit, although labourers in Bithigram and Keshipur also took loans from shopkeepers under similar arrangements. The Fonogram shopkeeper with the highest proportion of loans had the sizeable figure of an estimated 50,000 rupees on loan in 1988-89. In addition in Bithigram and Keshipur

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[13]The different proportion of agricultural labourers and farmers in Fonogram and Bithigram as opposed to all-West Bengal can be accounted for by time differences in the data.

[14]See Appendix 5.4 for the relation between income group, caste and tribe in the Midnapore villages.

payment of some wages, especially for women, was by kind, usually paddy. Credit did fuel the rural economy, and these exploitative systems are similar to those found elsewhere in West Bengal and India (see B. Harriss 1987: 12; Breman 1985a: 267-8; and for *dadan* Bose 1985: 101-2, and J. Harriss 1984: 11-13).

As to gender relations in the three villages, women were certainly subordinated by a well documented patriarchal system that ensured male control over resources within the village as a whole, and probably within most households (see White 1988; Mayoux 1982). For example, land and other productive assets were mainly passed down the patrilineal line. Strict *purdah* did not operate in any of the villages. In Fonogram the restrictions were more severe, and it was only widows and women in a few of the poorest households in Fonogram who were permitted to work outside their homestead; as this work could only be outside of the village, *purdah* 'norms' were maintained within the village. Work for these women was low paid and in exploitative and sometimes dangerous circumstances. There were no such *purdah* restrictions in the Midnapore villages, although pay for female labour was about 20% less than for male labour. Female headed households were found to be over-represented among the poorest in all three villages, and one cause of this was the general male control of village resources; it is these and other women who are the main focus of chapter seven.

To summarize, Fonogram, the main study village, was a Muslim village lying in a relatively fertile agricultural region with about three quarters of its households dependent on agriculture for primary source of income, half of all households being dependent on agricultural labour. Shallow tube wells had been introduced to the locality in 1985, facilitating a *boro* paddy crop not previously grown. Employment outside the village was mainly as unskilled labour. The person-land ratio was very high for Fonogram, and this was reflected in a higher number of landless and small operators than all West Bengal. Bithigram and Keshipur were smaller, Hindu villages, where the dominant farming caste were Mahatos. Both had large, poor minority groups, tribals in Bithigram and scheduled caste households in Keshipur. The villages lay in a transitional zone between alluvial and laterite soils. Person-land ratios were nearer to the West Bengal average than in Fonogram. In all three villages access to land was skewed in favour of households operating more than two and a half acres of land. While Bithigram and Keshipur were mainly agricultural, 36% of households in Keshipur and 15% of households in Bithigram were dependent on railway work outside the village. Credit systems existing in all three villages involved loans by shopkeepers to the poor, on which interest was paid; the *dadan* system also operated in the Midnapore villages.

5.4 Economic categorisation

Having given a general background to the study villages, the aim of this section is to outline the method of categorisation used that will describe the village socio-economic structure in terms of the distribution of all resources within the villages. Resources were not equally distributed, and analysis of socio-economic structure needs to account for this.

Past attempts in eight, mainly Marxist, studies of West Bengal and Bangladesh at categorisation of rural households, are discussed in Appendix 5.3. Analysis of these studies shows that there is some rough agreement about techniques to decide on village differentiation. However, there has been been no definitive model built which could be used in this thesis for the type of analysis required. As Howes (1985: 45) has remarked: 'Unfortunately there is no commonly agreed procedure for classifying rural households in Bangladesh.'[15] However, nothing said here should detract from the importance of the studies discussed inAppendix 5.3, and their attempts to analyse village socio-economic structure. From a methodological and theoretical point of view, an attempt to build a comprehensive model for differentiation deserves a thesis of its own, and is not the main focus of research here.

5.4.1 The method of categorization employed

In the absence of a formal model, to analyse village socio-economic structures this thesis first ranks households by income, and second differentiates households into four 'income groups', based mainly on income, employment and land operation. These methods appeared the most suitable for the purpose of understanding the distribution of all important village resources, including resources external to the village, and finding a method of analysis that left the data open to comparative analysis. The method of differentiation used therefore concentrates on the 'means of production' (see Appendix 5.3); exploitation and the 'relations of production' are considered in more detail in chapter seven.

Scott's method (1985: 91-5) for ranking village households was followed. Scott, for his Malaysian study village, calculated total household income per consumption unit (although he did not make clear what the components of this income were). Following Scott, I have calculated total yearly household income, based on the questions asked in Questionnaire 1 on income, and then ranked households by income per household consumption unit, with children below six counting as one third of an adult and children from six to twelve as two

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[15]Sadeque has also remarked (1984: 130): 'Class analysis of the Bengal peasantry has yet to receive a thorough treatment.'

thirds.[16] This method takes into account not only land operation but also land quality (as it deals with yields, as well as amount of land operated), ownership of cattle, income earned from labour and all other sources, and debt. Because of its comprehensiveness, this method was also suggested by Lipton (1989: 110-14) as a suitable method for categorizing households in order to study the effects of the 'green revolution' on village economy, which is the focus of the next chapter. Lipton has written (ibid. 113-14):

> Very many pieces of research have sought to assess the impact of MVs [modern varieties] on poor farming households by measuring MV adoption or performance in small farms, mostly over one season.... that focus should shift.... towards innovative studies linking MV innovations causally to incidence and severity of 'poverty'. This is best indicated, not by a household's farm size, but by its real income or consumption, per person or consumption-unit, from all sources (net of all production costs, debt obligations, etc.), at various stages in the diffusion of MVs and linked inputs.

To use such a method is considerably more time consuming than categorization by land ownership or operation alone, but also more accurate in terms of ranking households. The accuracy of the data gathered was considered sufficient to carry out the type of analysis required here. Use of income in this method does ignore, however, the important 'informal economy', such as gathering of common property resources, which is of greater relative importance to the poor, and which is discussed in chapter seven.

Households ranked by income for the three study villages are shown in Appendix 5.5a to 5.5c. Also noted in this Appendix for each household are land owned and operated, dependency ratios, primary and secondary sources of income, numbers in the household, and the respondents' reply as to how many months farm production would last for in an average year. The Appendix also describes in detail the method used for calculation of income.

5.4.2 Discussion of the four income groups

After ranking by income, village households were divided into four groups, which appeared both a convenient number for analysis and a number that equated to that used in past studies. Households were differentiated in the following manner. Figures A5.1-3 in Appendix 5.5 show that when households in the three villages are ranked, the level of income starts at a low level and increases gradually until the first natural break occurs in the data at about 2,000 rupees. This is consistent with the existence of a large number of landless and small operators, in conjunction with a smaller number of dominant 'middle'

[16]Details of land operation in Fonogram were also checked against the plot to plot survey carried out there.

farmers. It was decided that the wealthiest income group should be above the figure of 2,000 rupees. Given no other breaks in the data, the other divisions in the ranked households were made on the basis of occupation and land operated. The majority of households in income group 2 were agricultural labourers, while those in group 3 were either 'small' farmers or worked on the railways, so a division was made between these two groups on this basis.[17] The fact that income group 1 households were effectively landless, while group 2 households operated a small amount of land, was the basis for the division between the two groups. The number of months respondents said home production lasted for was consistent with these divisions, particularly in Fonogram and Bithigram (see Appendix 5.5a to 5.5c). While three different indicators were used for categorisation, these re-inforce each other rather than being contradictory. For example, the division between groups 2 and 3 on the basis of occupation also holds for groups 1 and 4, in that group 1 households are mainly agricultural labourers and group 4 households farmers or railway workers. Equally, as might be expected, given this occupational breakdown, the amount of land operated by each group increases from group 1 to group 4.[18] The methodology employed here also meets the requirements set by Shanin (1980: 98-100) for differentiation to be carried out, which should include the consideration of 'type' (here occupation), 'common demoninator' (here income) and 'categorization' (here the division into four categories).

The four economic categories suggested by the method outlined were 900 rupees or below per consumption unit per year (income group 1), between 901 and 1400 rupees (income group 2), between 1401 and 2000 rupees (income group 3), and above 2000 rupees (income group 4). It should be noted that the income categories do not give measures of poverty except in a narrow economic sense, but rather income and access to income. As is argued throughout this thesis, the essence of poverty must be understood in relation to the experience of poverty as well as the structures through which poverty is

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[17]See Appendix 5.6 for a breakdown of primary occupation by income group.

[18]The four categories decided upon also correspond roughly to the five classes delineated by Marxists, with the class of 'rich peasants' and 'landlords' excluded. This can be seen in the following equivalence:

Category in this thesis	Marxist category
Income group 1	Landless labourer
Income group 2	Marginal peasant
Income group 3	Small peasant
Income group 4	Middle peasant

Divisions in the ranked lists of households on the basis of nutritional data were not made, as discussion of inter- and intra-personal variation in energy use have shown (Lipton 1983a) that nutritional measures are likely to be less reliable than indicators such as land operation.

reproduced. The income groups should therefore be understood only as categories that enable a discussion of the distribution of resources in the village in an economic sense. The divisions decided upon were, as in all differentiation, arbitrary, but not ones that misrepresent village socio-economic structures. The divisions allow for a general discussion of these structures, and changing the levels of differentiation, for example by 10%, would not have made a significant difference to the general conclusions reached below.

Tables 5.4 to 5.6 give further details of income groups in the three villages. Figures for income, land operated and the months that home production lasts for (in the Tables denoted as 'Months rice lasts') are average figures for the whole income group. Footnotes to the three tables are given after Table 5.6.

Table 5.4 Fonogram village income groups

Inc. gr.	No. of h.holds (a)	Income (b)	Land (c)	Months rice lasts (d)	Occ. (e)	Dep. ratio (f)
1	51 (36)	668 (18)	17 (7)	0.5	al (60)	2.7
2	40 (28)	1132 (25)	45 (15)	0.9	al (65)	2.1
3	31 (22)	1659 (28)	132 (33)	3.5	f (45)	2
4	19 (14)	2838 (29)	291 (45)	9.1	f (74)	2

Table 5.5 Bithigram village income groups

Inc. gr.	No. of h.holds (a)	Income (b)	Land operated (c)	Months rice lasts (d)	Occ. (e)	Dep. ratio (f)
1	18 (19)	799 (9)	102 (8)	2.2	al (72)	1.3
2	42 (43)	1117 (32)	140 (26)	3.9	al (63)	1.1
3	16 (16)	1787 (19)	283 (22)	6.6	f (38)	1.8
4	21 (22)	2789 (40)	460 (44)	8.1	r (52)	1.3

Table 5.6 Keshipur village income groups

Inc. gr.	No. h.holds (a)	Income (b)	Land operated (c)	Months rice lasts (d)	Occ. (e)	Dep. ratio
1	13 (23)	744 (10)	108 (11)	2.2	al (63)	0.7
2	14 (25)	1133 (16)	208 (25)	3.7	al (43)	1.3
3	10 (18)	1662 (16)	222 (19)	4.9	r (40)	1.7
4	20 (34)	2939 (58)	268 (45)	5.1	r (85)	1.9

Footnotes to Tables 5.4 to 5.6.

(a) The figures in brackets are the percentage of households in each group.
(b) The figures are for each consumption unit per year, in rupees. The figures in brackets are percentages of total village income earned by each group.
(c) Land operated is in decimals. The figures in brackets give the percentages of land operated by each income group.
(d) This is an estimate by respondents of the number of months that all production from household land operated would last for in an average year if consumed within the household or sold.
(e) Occ. = occupation, al = agricultural labourers, f = farmers, r = railway work. The occupation in the column is the occupation of the income group by which the majority of households in that group earnt their primary income. Figures in brackets denote the percentage in each income group with that particular occupation.

(f) Dependency ratio here means the number of workers aged over twelve working for more than three months in a year, divided by all other household members. Average dependency ratios for the whole villages were:
Fonogram - 2.3
Bithigram - 1.3
Keshipur - 1.5
For a description of methods of calculation of the incomes of individual households, see Appendix 5.5.

The Tables show that income distribution in all of the villages is similar.[19] There is less than a 10% difference in income per consumption unit between the same inter-village income group except in the case of income group 1, between Fonogram on the one hand and Bithigram and Keshipur on the other. The percentages of households in each group are less similar, with Fonogram having a higher percentage of households in group 1, almost double the number in Bithigram, although the percentages of households in groups 1 and 2 are similar in Fonogram and Bithigram. In Keshipur there is a higher percentage of households in group 4, because of the access to railway related work by Mahato households. The percentage of income earnt by group 4 is absolutely higher in Keshipur than in the other two villages, but not higher when the relative sizes of the groups is taken into consideration.

Income is unevenly distributed in all villages. For example, in Fonogram the 14% of households in income group 4 earnt 29% of village income, whereas the 36% in income group 1 earnt 18%. In Bithigram and Keshipur income can be seen to be even more firmly in the hands of income group 4. Intra-village group differences in absolute income were higher in Fonogram, where absolute income for group 4 is 4.25 times that of group 1, the figure for Bithigram being 3.5, and for Keshipur 4.

The figures for land operated shows greater disparity than income in the case of Fonogram, with group 4 operating seventeen times as much land as group 1, the figure for Bithigram being 4.5 and for Keshipur 2.5. In the case of Keshipur, ranking and categorization on the basis of land operation alone would have shown a more equal distribution of resources than when all household income is considered. Categorization in Fonogram on the same basis would have shown a more unequal distribution of resources (see section 5.3.3 above on land operation). This is an example of the greater sophistication involved in using income rather than land operation as a method of categorization. Households in income group 4 in Keshipur had low average holdings of land, relative to the size of the income group, although each income group 4 operated about 45% of village land. While the percentage of village land operated by group 1 in each village is similar (7%

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[19]This can also be seen in graph form in Figures A5.1-3 in Appendix 5.5.

in the case of Fonogram, 8% in Bithigram, and 11% in Keshipur), the percentage of households in this group in Fonogram is much higher than in the Midnapore villages, meaning that there was less land per household in Fonogram. Further details of operation of *danga* and *sali* land in the Midnapore villages can be found in Appendix 5.2.

The numbers of months respondents estimated their home production would last for shows that the Midnapore villages were more subsistence based than Fonogram, as would be expected from Dasgupta's (1975) typology. Fonogram income group 4 respondents estimated that their home production would last for eighteen times as long as income group one respondents, very similar to the difference between land operation figures (a difference of seventeen). This is of particular interest as Fonogram figures on land operation can be taken as accurate. Estimates of home production could therefore be used as a check on or supplement to estimates of land operation.

Numbers and percentages for occupation of households show that all groups in Fonogram are mainly dependent on agriculture for their primary source of income (see also Appendix 5.6). Agricultural labourers predominated in groups 1 and 2 in all three villages. As stated above, employment on the railways was of particular importance to the Keshipur economy.[20]

The relatively low income of Fonogram's households, given its setting in an area of fertile soil, has been partly explained above in relation to person-land ratios in the three villages (see Table 5.2). Average income per consumption unit for the whole of the villages is 1310 rupees in the case of Fonogram, 1530 rupees for Bithigram and 1771 rupees for Keshipur. The higher number of people per household in Fonogram (six, as opposed to five in the Midnapore villages), and the higher average dependency ratios in all income groups and on average for Fonogram as a whole, also accounts for the relatively low income of Fonogram households (see note f to Tables 5.4-5.6). One factor involved in this higher dependency ratio is that women in Fonogram generally do not earn cash income. This is partly balanced by the fact that agricultural wages were about 30% higher for most agricultural operations in Fonogram, while the seasonal price of rice was fairly similar in all three villages. Although more land in Fonogram was double cropped, the possible comparative advantage for labourers of greater employment because of this was balanced by the higher dependency ratio and lack of employment outside of the villages.

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[20]See Appendix 5.4 for a discussion of the relation between income group, caste and tribe in the Midnapore villages.

5.5 Conclusions

The characteristics of the two types of study villages fitted the typology set up by Dasgupta (1975) for agriculturally 'backward' and 'advanced' Indian villages, in that Fonogram was larger, irrigated, had more landless and a more unequal landholding pattern. Despite this, the socio-economic structure of the moribund delta of West Bengal, with a large number of landless, land poor and small operators existing in conjunction with a small group of dominant 'middle' farmers, could be seen to hold in all the study villages, and in two quite different agro-ecological settings, and this was supported by the data on income distribution which showed similar patterns. This suggests that income is a more accurate indicator of household welfare than the various indicators suggested by Dasgupta, although gathering accurate estimates of income may be difficult in rural surveys.

In the study villages the 'middle' farmers controlled the main village resources, both economic and political, and more remunerative jobs outside of the villages, and were located mainly in income group 4. The landless, agricultural labourers and tribal and scheduled caste groups pre-dominated in income groups 1 and 2. 'Small' farmers were the main group in income group 3. Caste relations reinforced dominant control over resources in the Midnapore villages.

The purpose of this chapter was to analyse socio-economic structure in the study villages to contextualize the data to be presented in chapters six and seven. In doing so methods of ranking and categorisation were chosen that appeared suitable for the purpose of the study and the general level of discussion needed for this contextualization and analysis. Again, total annual income per consumption unit was seen as a more sophisticated measure of household standing than household land operated. Income categories, land operation or occupation describe only the bare bones of village life; it is the flesh on these bones to which the thesis now moves.

CHAPTER SIX

Rural development and land use in the case study villages: how resource access is mediated by power

6.1 Introduction

This chapter is primarily concerned with the effect of external intervention and capital on the socio-economic structure of Fonogram. The intervention considered is an irrigation scheme, and the main point discussed will be the relevance of this initiative to the poor and other groups in Fonogram, and its effect on socio-economic structure. In analysing structure it balances the discussion in chapter seven which deals with the agency of the poorest, and covers one of the two interlocking features of structure and agency identified as relevant to this study in chapters two and three. The irrigation scheme in Fonogram is also contrasted to the government land distribution programme in the Midnapore study villages.

The discussion in this chapter is selective; to retain a distinct focus, it considers mainly equity aspects of the green revolution and land redistribution, rather than efficiency aspects, although it is clear that the two cannot be easily separated. Although the importance of efficiency debates, such as those concerning the relative production of 'small' and 'large' farmers, is recognized, it was not possible to cover these debates within the scope of this thesis.

The main debates concerning the 'green revolution' in India are reviewed in section 6.2, as a means of contextualizing the field level data. Sections 6.3 to 6.10 discuss empirical findings from Fonogram, with the assistance of *mouza* maps, and in the context of structural features of the West Bengal agrarian economy outlined in chapter four. To my knowledge, *mouza* maps have not been used for an analysis of the interaction of land use and socio-economic structure in such detail in West Bengal before, at least since the plot to plot enumeration carried out in pre-Independence Bengal (Government of Bengal 1946). Section 6.3 describes how the irrigation scheme was introduced in Fonogram. Section 6.4 provides details of land use and cropping patterns in the village, and the relevance of these to the village socio-economic structure. Sections 6.5 to 6.8 examine differential access by income and occupation groups to the wealth created by the green revolution. Sections 6.9 and 6.10 discuss the changes, including land sales and mortgaging, that have occurred in Fonogram since the irrigation scheme began, and the effect of these and other changes on the village power structure. Section 6.11 concludes as to how rural development resources are mediated by power in rural West Bengal. Appendix 6.2 provides background to the

government's land reform programme, and examines the effect of this programme in the two Midnapore study villages; it is suggested that this Appendix be read after section 6.10, for comparative purposes.

Despite over twenty years of study on the green revolution, Lipton has written after a comprehensive survey of relevant literature (1989: 300):

> Our grasp of how village micro structures of power (involving tenure and credit as well as land) affects MVs (modern varieties) impact on the poor is at present crude and undifferentiated.

This chapter will attempt to provide a greater understanding of such micro-structures. Lipton (ibid.: 109) has also commented that the most important effect of HYVs (high yielding varieties) in terms of poverty concerns income from hired labour, although this subject has been relatively poorly covered; the 'pro-poor' focus in this thesis will also attempt to address this bias against the poor.

6.2 The 'green revolution' in South Asia

As many words have been written on the green revolution as farmers have harvested *maunds* of HYV paddy. It is necessary to review some relevant themes in the debate from South Asia in order to contextualize my areas of enquiry.

The 'swings of fashion' in this debate - from the optimism about increases in crop production in the late 1960's, to pessimistic fears of polarization and agrarian unrest in the early seventies, to a new optimism in the eighties - have been reviewed elsewhere (see Lipton 1989: 18-21; Farmer 1986; Chambers 1984: 363-5), and will not be discussed in detail here.[1] Optimists and pessimists have tended to address different agendas, although there have been various shades of argument from both sides. Optimists have mainly considered efficiency (or increases in crop production) and viewed development in terms of more food production. This is related to a consistent theme in the green revolution literature - the relation between food production and population growth. These two factors are often isolated and compared in such terms as 'food production needs to keep pace with population growth in 'x' country' (see Hossain 1989: 13-14, 39, 131; Lipton 1989: 214-5, 338, 359; Barker and Herdt 1985: 157). However, as Levy (1982: 283) has noted this

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[1]Although history may not repeat itself, social debates do. The 'standard of living debate' concerning nineteenth century Britain also involved two parties - known as optimists and pessimists (see Himmelfarb 1984: 9) - and developed along similar lines to the green revolution debate.

form of argument excludes the wider political implications of concentrating on food production in individual countries, and ignores the international nature of captalism.

On the other hand, pessimists have tended to consider distribution (or gains of different parties), and have come to ahistorical conclusions as to the possibility of future violence and class conflict in rural India (see the discussion on Frankel in chapter two). This chapter takes a 'pessimistic' view of the green revolution, but recognizes the limited nature of any single village study, and the dangers of ahistoricity.

6.2.1 The relation between technology and society

Did the intial planning behind the green revolution mean it was likely to benefit particular rural groups? The HYV package, including HYV cereal seeds, chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and irrigation facilities, was introduced into selected agriculturally 'progressive' areas of India in the mid-1960's. The background to this was a series of crop failures in India (Dasgupta 1980: 349), and there was an association made between the introduction of the HYV package and fears of agrarian unrest. As J. Harriss (1987: 229-30) puts it:

> Research foundations established by the American capitalists Ford and Rockefeller played a very important role in organizing and funding the research which produced the HYVs. And the strategic, geopolitical interests of the United States in changing rural social and economic conditions in Asia and Latin America, with a view to the containment of communist expansion, were clear.[2]

This point is also dealt with by Oasa (1987), who attempted to show that one of the aims of the International Rice Research Institute, which propagated newer agricultural technology, was to concentrate on small, resource poor farmers, to halt 'proletarianization' and increasing differentiation between poorer and richer farmers and possible agrarian tension that would result from this.[3] This strategy therefore has implications for future growth, for it may be (an hypothesis that it is not possible to explore in this thesis) that the type of growth that occurs with the green revolution, by supporting specific rural groups, will restrain other types of rural development, such as land redistribution or the development of co-operatives. A crucial point to make here is that the effects of the HYVs cannot be separated from wider social processes of which the HYVs are a part.

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[2]See also Farmer (1986: 176).

[3]The terms 'poorer' and 'richer' are used here rather than 'poor' and 'rich', as the former express the relative nature of poverty and wealth.

Some optimists (e.g. Lipton 1989: 12, 13, 185, 325; Singh 1988: 62; Pinstrup-Andersen and Hazell 1985: 11) have assumed that the poor in South Asia would now have been worse off if the HYV package had not been introduced. The problem with this statement is the limited way in which it has been framed; it assumes that without the HYV package all other things would have been equal, and the 'red revolution' hypothesized in the 1960s, or any other radical rural change, would not have taken place. Whether or not the poor are better off after the green revolution, in both a relative and an absolute sense, is further discussed below using field data.

6.2.2 'Farmer' size

At least two thirds of the literature on the green revolution has been concerned with benefits to 'small' and 'big' farmers, to the partial exclusion of attention on the landless (Lipton 1989: 108). It is now recognized that, relative to size holdings, smaller farmers have gained from the HYV package, although the extent of this gain is regionally specific (Lipton 1989: 109-68; Hossain 1989: 71-78; and see the micro-studies by Bradnock 1984 and Jones 1984, for Tamil Nadu and Bangladesh respectively). Lipton (1989: 114) has suggested the limits of considering 'farmer' size, and that research to determine benefits from the HYV package should look at total income per consumption unit of a household over time within the total social setting, rather than 'big' or 'small' farmers. The latter I have attempted below (see also chapter 5 on methodology), and therefore discuss benefits to cultivators in terms of income groups as well as farmer size.

6.2.3 Employment

The HYV package has increased employment, although the degree of this may be regionally specific and dependent on the total cropping pattern of an area, not just which crop the HYV crop replaces (see Basant 1987a: 1300 and Prahladachar 1983: 936-7 for general discussion; Ghosh 1988: 885 and Ghosh 1985: 101 for West Bengal; and Clay 1981 for Bangladesh). However, while employment may increase, wages may not, due to in-migration, mechanization or other factors (Hossain 1989: 99, 107; Ghosh 1985; Barker and Herdt 1985: 131; Prahladachar 1983: 936-7). There is also some agreement that the introduction of HYVs increases the use of hired over 'family' labour (Hossain 1989: 44-6; Basant 1987b: 1349, 1352; Barker and Herdt 1985: 128; and Prahladachar 1983: 936; for a contrary view from Bangladesh, see Alauddin and Tisdell 1989: 563).[4] This may be to the relative benefit of households with agricultural labour as the primary source of income, and this is further discussed below.

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[4]'Household', defined as those who eat food cooked from the same hearth, is used below rather than 'family'.

6.2.4 Factor shares

While employment increases, calculation of shares to different groups (known as factor shares) may show that while agricultural labourers have gained absolutely from HYVs, they have not gained relatively in comparison to other sections of village society. This is a view taken in almost all recent literature (see Alauddin and Tisdell 1989: 563: Hossain 1989: 126; Lipton 1989: 185-6; Barker and Herdt 1985: 132; Howes 1985: 111-2; Jones and Ahamad 1985: 21-4; Chinnappa and Silva 1977: 210-11; Mellor 1976: 79-82). I will argue that to assess clearly the effects of the introduction of the HYV package it is necessary to consider both absolute and relative gains or losses to different social groups. This is because individuals think in terms both of absolute gains or losses (how much better or worse off they are than before) and relative terms (how much better or worse off they are in relation to others).[5]

I will emphasize in discussing relative benefits the relation between the household and the wider market, and that benefits from the HYV package should not be seen in isolation from the overall ability of a household to improve its socio-economic position. This chapter will show that wealthier Fonogram households have made substantial gains from urban linkages that have been strengthened by the green revolution.

6.2.5 Partial proletarianization and differentiation

The argument about absolute and relative gains in turn connects to a further debate on the HYV package, on differentiation. As discussed in chapter five, the differentiation debate has been pursued most diligently by Marxists. They have addressed issues raised by Dasgupta (1980: 372), who stated that the HYV package had led to:

> ....proletarianization of the peasantry and a consequent increase in the number and proportion of landless households, growing concentration of land and assets in fewer hands and widening disparity between the rich and poor households....

These assertions have been modified by others (Harriss 1987: 238-9; Bhaduri *et al* 1986: 87; Howes 1985: 64-5; Byres 1981: 427), who discuss a process of what Byres calls (ibid: 432) 'partial proletarianization', whereby some 'poor' peasant households become landless labour households through enforced sale of land to richer households, and others maintain a hold on land by mortgaging or renting out land to 'rich' peasant households, while at the same time expanding their off-farm income opportunities. As J. Harriss noted (1987: 241): '....even in circumstances where the introduction of the new varieties has been relatively

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[5]This has been recognized by Mellor (1976: 82); and Jones (1985: 24).

successful....the dissolution of small peasant production with a process of 'depeasantization', does not necessarily occur'.[6]

Webster (1989) in a ten year re-survey of three villages in Birbhum District, West Bengal, found no increase in polarization from 1977-78 to 1987-88, between different categories of landowners. Webster connects this to the Left Front government's policies avoiding structural change (ibid.: 41). This again relates to the political origins of the green revolution. If, as Harriss suggests (1987: 241): '....any potential antagonism between rich and poor peasants has been dampened because of the participation of poor peasants, too, in the 'green revolution'....', then the forces behind the green revolution can be seen to have achieved their purpose of reinforcing village power structures, as outlined by Oasa above.

6.2.6 Other issues

Other important areas concerning the HYV package are its gender and environmental effects. The former is discussed here only in terms of post harvest processing and gleaning by poorest families, as no Fonogram women were engaged in farm work outside of the household. The latter has not, to my knowledge, been covered comprehensively in any micro-level study (although Madduma Bandura (1977) has considered hydrological effects), and its treatment here will also be incidental.

The general issues outlined in this section will be discussed throughout this chapter as a means of gauging the effect of the green revolution on the power structure in Fonogram, particularly as far as the poor are concerned.

6.3 The green revolution in Fonogram and West Bengal

6.3.1 The green revolution in Fonogram

Capitalist agricultural development did not 'penetrate' Fonogram in the sense that it was directed from a capitalist centre to the 'traditional' 'pre-capitalist' periphery. As was seen in Appendix 4.1, rural north 24 Parganas has been integrated into the wider market since at least the 1850's, particularly through the sale of cash crops to Calcutta and its hinterland.

The introduction of irrigation facilities and subsequent agricultural development should also be seen in the context of general development in the Fonogram locality. Urban linkages increased through the 1980's. Two large pharmaceutical factories were built about 3 kms from Fonogram in the late 1980's, although unionisation within the work force meant that no Fonogram villagers could get employment in them. There was an increase of

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[6]See Harriss (1989) for further discussion.

lorries owned locally, discussed below. 'Plotting' - the division of land into plots for housing - was also taking place near to Fonogram, which would increase requirements for building materials and the value of land. These developments may have taken place without increased local agricultural development. The presence of new STWs meant that mechanical hand tractors were used in selected local areas for the first time in 1986. Local shops also grew larger and more numerous in response to new opportunities, selling, for example, chemical fertilizers; and a new market grew up around the maintenance and repair of STWs.

The information below concerning the introduction of irrigation facilities into Fonogram comes from two sources. Firstly, from interviews with Fonogram villagers responsible for their introduction, particularly Romesh Ali; and with the Director of the Rural Development Consortium (RDC), a body which co-ordinates and channels support to about 250 voluntary projects in West Bengal, and through which Romesh Ali and others applied for foreign funding. And, secondly, from the files on the Fonogram project at RDC, and through correspondence with the Stuttgart office of Bread for the World (BFTW), an aid agency which funded the Fonogram facilities indirectly through RDC. The project application and relevant appraisal can be found in Appendix 6.1a-b.

There were several actors in the introduction of irrigation facilities into Fonogram and surrounding *mouzas*. The first was Romesh Ali, an entrepreneur from the household with the second highest income in the village. Romesh's father had been an agricultural labourer; through hard work and cutting consumption over many years, Romesh's family sent him to school and through college where he took a B. Com degree, and became the first Fonogram villager to receive a degree. After this he worked as a teacher locally. Romesh's wife had a clerical job, and his elder brother, with whom he lived, ran a small poultry business. Romesh's household had bought about two hectares of land, and operated in 1989 more than any other household in the village.

In the mid-1970's Romesh was involved in setting up a committee called the *Udayan Samaj Kalyan Samity* , (literally 'the committee for the uplift of society', and henceforth called the *samity*), a voluntary organisation registered under the Registration of Societies Act, modelled on similar organisations in nearby villages, and formed by villagers from Fonogram and, in theory, seven other local villages. In effect, the *samity* appeared to be mainly run by Romesh Ali, who was its Secretary, in association with the heads of two other households with among the highest incomes in Fonogram (households 139 and 141), and the eldest son of a further household (household 109), the head of which had in the past been acknowledged as village leader. The aim of the *samity* was, to quote from an

RDC project application (Appendix 6.1a: 1), to '....build up a self-reliant community in which the economically and socially depressed people are capable of taking their place as equal partner of the society'.

The Treasurer of the *samity* lived near to Fonogram, and also worked for the RDC, the second actor in the scenario. RDC's involvement with the *samity* appeared to be limited to grant giving and evaluation. In the late 1970's the *samity* received 24,000 rupees from RDC for the provision of cycle vans and rickshaws, goats and poultry, and small loans to 'landless families' (see Appendix 6.1a: 2). In 1989 there were still rumours that some of these funds had been misapproriated. If there was any misuse of funds, this was not discovered by RDC. The inital contact between RDC and the *samity* led to a larger scheme, first suggested by RDC to BTFW at the end of 1980. The main object of this was, to quote the pilot project plan sent by RDC to BFTW (Appendix 6.1a: 6-7):

> ....to assist the landless agricultural and other landless labourer families by increasing employment opportunities and creating avenues for subsidiary income as also to extend irrigation facilities to the weaker section cultivating families to step up agricultural production by adoption of improved cultural practices and introduction of multiple cropping pattern.

The intended objectives of the project, and its evaluation, are therefore of direct relevance to the subject matter of this thesis, as 'landless agricultural and other landless families' are among the poorest in rural West Bengal.

Following the formulation of the project proposal, 14 STWs were installed in the Fonogram locality throughout 1985 (see Map 6.1), and it is this aspect of the *samity's* work on which this chapter focusses.[7] The cost of these STWs was 196,000 rupees. Half of this money, the 'people's contribution', came from a District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) subsidy, through the Department of Rural Development of the Government of West Bengal.[8] The other half came from a bank loan, which had to be repaid over seven years at 10% interest from sale of water to farmers at six rupees an hour (half the cost of a local Government deep tube well). Funding of 50,000 rupees that had been provided by BFTW was retained under bank rules as guarantee money or, as Romesh put it, 'security money' (for details, see Appendix 6.1b). Romesh also organized a workshop near to the village at the end of 1986 where a government agricultural extension worker explained to farmers the procedures involved in growing an HYV crop.

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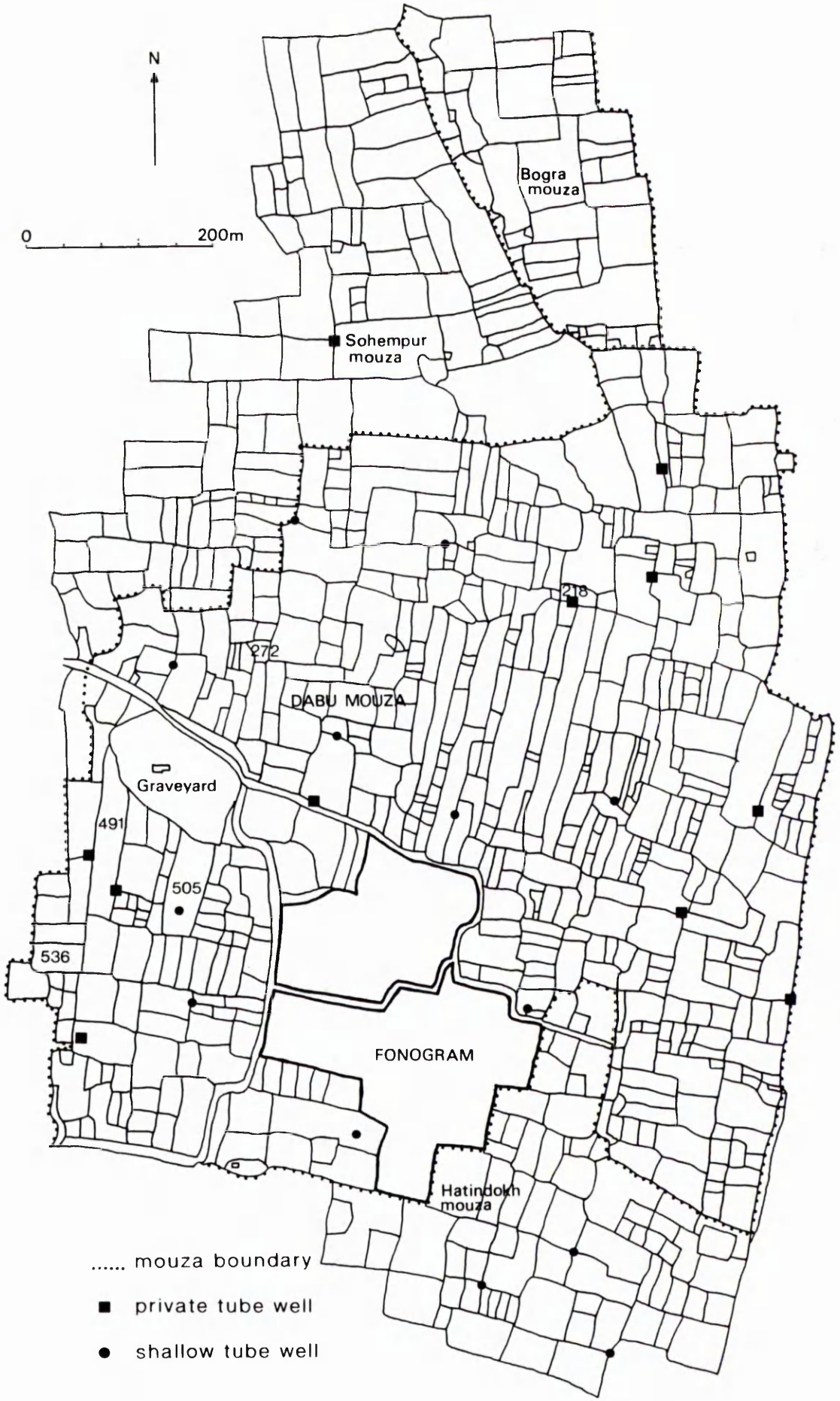
[7]Other components of the programme were minor compared to the irrigation prorgamme. For details, see Appendix 6.1a.

[8]BFTW's terms for allocation of funds was that half of any project costs should be met by a 'people's contribution' from those to benefit from the project.



Map 6.1 Fonogram village and its environment

The project proposal of RDC and its subsequent report (Appendix 6.1a-b) included an analysis of the socio-economic status of Fonogram and surrounding villages. It stated that most of the cultivated land in the area was: '....owned by the weaker section families of the marginal and small farmers', and banded together 'landless working (sic), marginal and small farmer families' as the 'target group' , the latter two groups owning an estimated 70% of cultivable land in the area (Appendix 6.1a: 6). The application made this division between different categories of family by using the crude gradations employed by the National Sample Survey (and using land owned, rather than land operated as in the NSS), so that a 'small farmer' family was said to own 2.5-5 acres of land, and is contrasted to affluent families likely to own more than 5 acres. As suggested in chapter four, such gradations are too gross as far as the land holding situation in West Bengal is concerned, and 'small farmers' in north 24 Parganas do not own more than 2.5 acres of land. Only 11 households in Fonogram owned more than this amount, 8 of these being in income group 4. In fact, 'small' and 'marginal' farmers in the RDC categorisation made up almost the entire cultivating population of Fonogram. Such imprecise classification makes an evaluation of the project on its own terms difficult; however the following discussion will show at village level the results of such gross analysis of socio-economic data.

The project proposal also stated that: '....almost (the) entire area can very conveniently be brought within the command of shallow tubewells....'. It added that: 'While the irrigation facilities will be concentrated in the lands of the small and marginal farmers, some land of more affluent farmers will also have to be covered in the group irrigation scheme. At the instance of the Project Holder (the *samity*), the affluent have agreed to bear their respective share of loans with informal share croppers.' (Appendix 6.1a: 3).

In its 1985 analysis of the irrigation scheme, RDC remarked that: 'It was evident from the performance that the project holder has created a good impact among the target group through different appropriate programmes as detailed above. ....The area was mono-cropped but now the beneficiaries have been able to raise more than one crop in the same piece of land....' (Appendix 6.1b: 4). And in an appraisal made at the end of 1986 the same RDC staff member stated: '....this project created a good impact among the target group of population ....thereby extending avenues for landless labour families....'.[9] These claims and assertions are considered in detail below. One other point is worth making here; the project ignored gender issues, and shows no recognition of the fact that its attention is directed specifically towards agriculture and men.

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[9]The reference here is to RDC files.

6.3.2 The West Bengal context

To place the Fonogram scheme in context, the development of STWs and other minor irrigation is now a priority for the Government of West Bengal. A government review states (Government of West Bengal 1986: 31): '....great weightage has been given to (promote) minor irrigation ....in areas which cannot be covered by canals and channels in the major irrigation areas, attempts have been made and are also being made to give subsidies to sink DTWs, STWs....'.

In 1988 there were some 340,000 STWs in West Bengal, as opposed to 78,000 in 1976-77 (Palmer-Jones 1989: 8; Government of West Bengal 1986: 32). Subsequent to this increase in STWs has been increased production of paddy during the *boro* season, estimated by Palmer-Jones (1989: 2) to have grown from some 8% to 25% of total State food grain production from 1977 to 1988. In 1988, private lift irrigation systems (LISs, encompassing STWs) owned by individual households in India accounted for over 95% of groundwater development (Chambers et al 1989: 98). In West Bengal a similar figure holds, with over 95% of the 340,000 STWs owned privately. This raises interesting questions concerning the efficiency of private as opposed to public ownership, as well as the scale and potential for poverty alleviation through the regulation of water markets, discussed by both Palmer-Jones (1989:14 -19) and Chambers *et al* (1988: 98-118), but which will not be a focus of discussion here.

For India as a whole public and private group irrigation facilities have made up less than 5% of the total in the 1980's (Chambers *et al* 1989: 80-81). In one sense therefore the Fonogram programme is not representative of wider developments in West Bengal or India, and the following analysis adds to the bias of academic attention on public as opposed to private irrigation development, a bias only recently recognized (Palmer-Jones 1989: 10). This does not interfere with the main purpose of evaluating the Fonogram programme, which is to analyse the socio-economic structure in the village. However, the way in which the water market was managed by the *samity* did resemble private use of STWs in various ways. Similarities were: that the control of the resource was in the hands of a wealthy few, who restricted the amount of water distributed; water rates at 300 rupees a bigha for water from electric STWs were the same as for private tubewells owned by individuals (Palmer-Jones 1987:7); and the Fonogram scheme had received a subsidy from the Government of West Bengal, as have many private owners.

As well as this, the evaluation in this chapter may have wider implications. Several authors (e.g. J. Harriss 1984: 32-3; N. Bandyopadhyay 1983: 118; 1981 A42; Sengupta 1981: A75) have suggested that the formation of co-operatives should be a next step

forward for the Left Front government. The evaluation of what is essentially a co-operative venture, half funded by the State government, may provide suggestions as to possible future developments. Such an evaluation can also demonstrate whether the government intervention has been reformist, as suggested in chapter four; and whether it has, as Webster puts it (1989: 40) : '....avoided the dangers of alienating the middle peasants.'

6.4 Land type and use in the Fonogram area

This section provides a background to land type and use in the cultivable area surrounding Fonogram. It discusses natural and social variables that are important in determining crop choice - fragmentation and position of holdings, land height, and soil type. These variables combine with the power structure in Fonogram to determine a specific person-land interaction, and need to be considered when analysing the outcome of the irrigation scheme. Land 'owned' should be taken here as meaning self-operated land belonging to Fonogram households, including land mortgaged in; land 'hired' means land sharecropped; and land 'operated' means a combination of land owned and hired.[10]

6.4.1 'Minifundist' farming in the Fonogram area

Fonogram village and its immediate surroundings, including the land operated by Fonogram households, is shown in Map 6.1, along with *mouza* boundaries, the position of the thirteen of the *samity's* STWs and private STWs, and the location of specific plots to be mentioned in the text.[11] This Map is based on settlement survey operation maps (or *mouza* maps) first produced in 1928. Map 6.1 shows an updated version of the 1928 maps made by the Land Revenue Office between 1954-1958.

Map 6.1 is made up of parts of four different *mouzas* maps where Fonogram villagers operated land, as neither the village nor the land the villagers operated lay within one *mouza* . A further complicating feature of the Map is that much of the land in these *mouzas* was owned by non-Fonogram villagers.

As Map 6.1 is based on the settlement survey carried out from 1954 -1958, it does not show contemporary divisions of individual plots. For example, plot number (PN) 272, which is 11 decimals in size, is shown as one plot on Map 6.1, but by 1989 it had been divided between three brothers who farmed their plots separately; similarly PN 536, which

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[10]Mortgaged land was included with self operated land as it tended to pass to the mortgagee; see section 6.9.2 on mortgage contracts.

[11]One *samity* STW fell outside the Maps, but was not in any case used by Fonogram households.

About half of the plots operated by Fonogram households had been further sub-divided by 1989; this is not shown on the Map for purposes of clarity, although such sub-divisions have been included in the following analysis. To give two other pointers to the scale of the map, the graveyard is 296 decimals and PN 218 20 decimals in size. The 'minifundist' nature of land operation, as it has been termed (BARD 1976), and the extent of fragmentation of holdings, is visually apparent in Map 6.1.

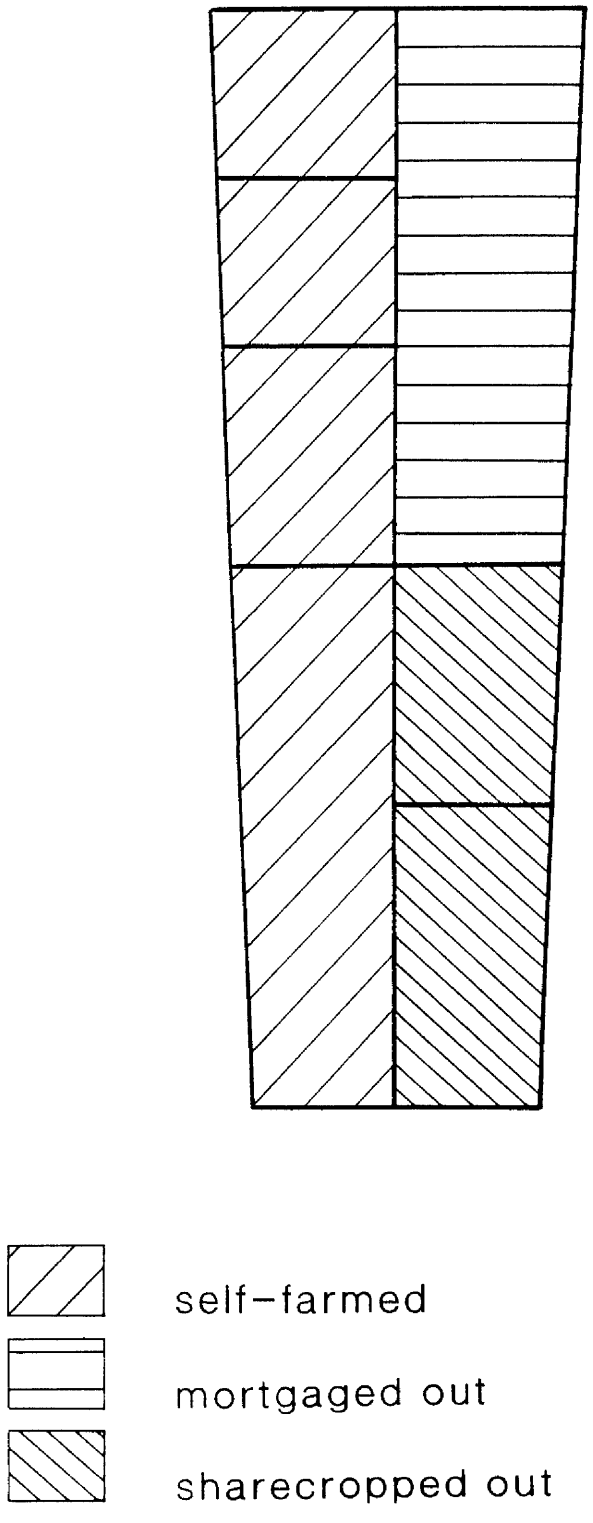
Map 6.2 shows the complex nature of local land use, using PN 505 in the 1987-88 *boro* season as an example. This plot, which was under paddy, was 100 decimals in size and was operated by eight different households, all of whom were close relatives. Half of the plot was self operated, while the other half was under two different forms of tenancy. The operation of this plot is representative of a pattern of land use that is likely to become more common in the area because of pressure on land.

6.4.2 Plot size and fragmentation

In 1988-89 Fonogram villagers operated some 50 hectares of land. They owned 490 separate plots on about 39 hectares of land, and operated a further 130 plots on the remaining 11 hectares.[12] This gives an average figure of about 21 decimals per plot operated (although this average hides the fact that some single operated plots were up to one hectare in size). This is lower than the 42 decimals per operational holding for West Bengal in 1970-1 (calculated from Boyce 1987: 210). The difference in the figures is accounted for by increased fragmentation since 1970-1, and by Fonogram's location in a fertile area where fragmentation would be expected to be higher and landholdings of a smaller size than, for example, central Midnapore District.

Each Fonogram household operating land on average cultivated seven and a half plots and 150 decimals of land. These plots were not necessarily near to each other. Households generally operated land in several different places, so as to ensure a mix of land qualities and heights. This increased the possibility of growing a mix of crops, and insured against natural disaster which might affect some parts of a *mouza* , as occured in Fonogram (discussed below). Muslim land inheritance systems in Fonogram added to disarticulation in two ways. Firstly, equal amounts of land were inherited by all sons of the household when the head of household died. In theory females inherited half of an equivalent male relative, but in practice usually waived this right to their brothers in return for future expected support from them. Secondly, to ensure equal distribution of the same qualities

[12]Calculation has been made through use of Land Revenue Office divisions of plots, supplemented by field data from 1988-89. Division is by plot and not crop type, although on about 14% of operated land cultivators grew the same crop on contiguous plots or parts of plots.



Map 6.2 Land use, Fonogram plot no. 505, 1987-88 *boro* season

of land, inheritors generally received one part of each of the household's plots; this meant that a household with three plots and three inheritors would split the plots into three divisions each.

What was the relation of fragmentation to the village power structure? Using the details on plot operation gathered, it is possible to test Farmer's hypothesis (1986: 190):

> ....in rice-growing areas the large farmer may have an additional advantage over the small farmer because he holds his land in more parcels occupying more classes of land (as determined by such factors as physiography, soil and depth of flooding); so that, in any given season in any given year, he will have more chance of growing HYVs and achieving high yields on at least one of his parcels.

Table 6.1 gives average number of plots operated and size of plots for the four income groups in Fonogram.

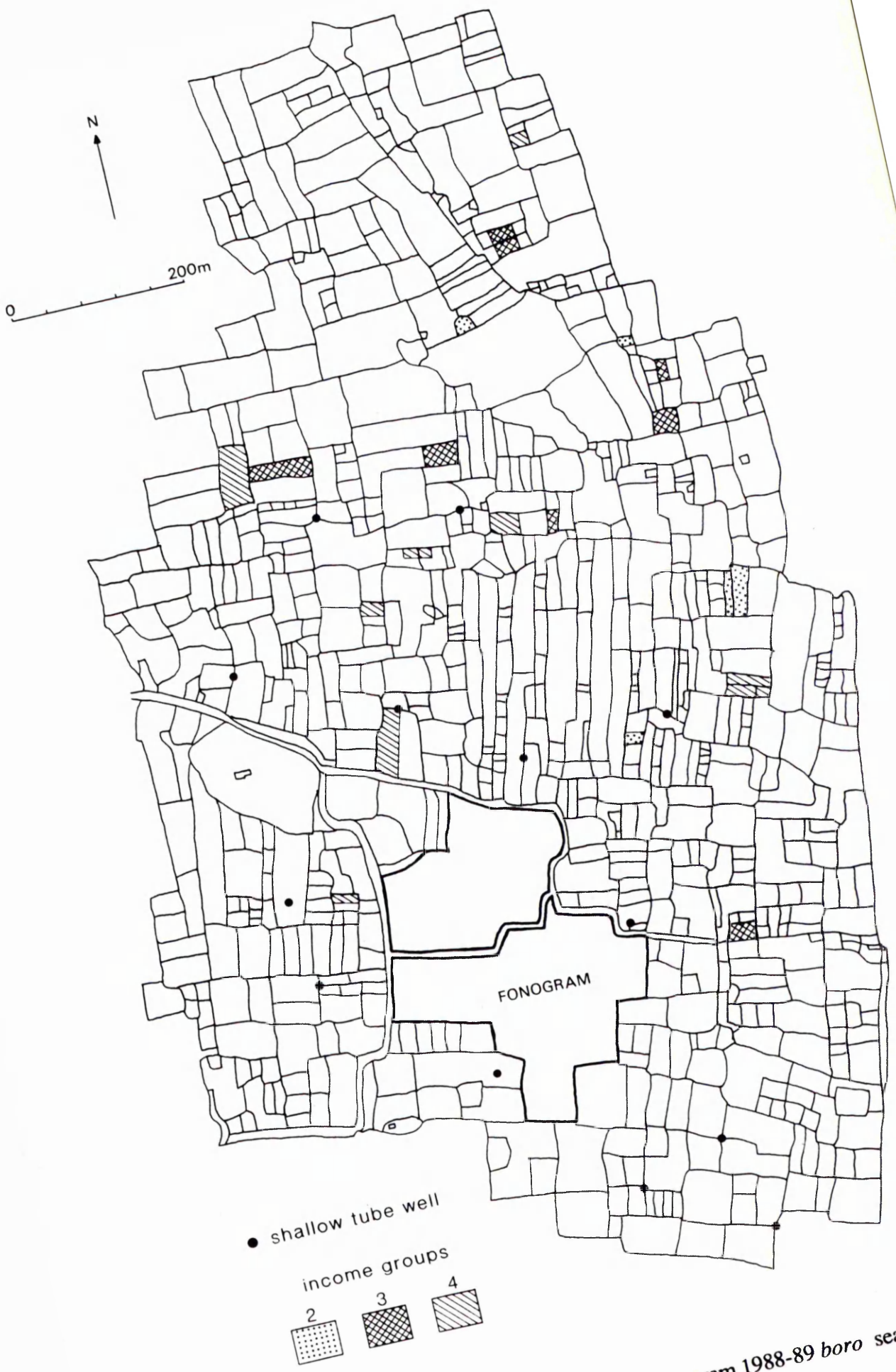
Table 6.1 Average number and size of plots operated by income group, Fonogram 1988-89

Income group	Average no. plots operated	Average size plots operated (decimals)
1	1	17
2	3	16
3	8	17
4	11	26

Given this data, Farmer's hypothesis can be seen to be partly validated. In Fonogram it is the largest landoperators, in income group 4, who have an advantage in terms of numbers of operated plots. However the advantage of these larger landoperators is not as great as it might have been, in that their plots are held in larger sizes per plot, half as large again as the other three income groups (i.e. if landoperators in income group 4 had operated land in plots sized 17 decimals they would have operated 17 plots each).

Land operated by three 'representative' households from income groups 2, 3 and 4 is shown on Map 6.3.[13] In the 1988-89 *boro* season household 54 from income group 2 operated five plots and a total of 61 decimals of land, 53 decimals of which were sharecropped-in. Household 93 from income group 3 operated 149 decimals of land, all its own, in eight plots. Household 135 from income group 4 operated 278 decimals, all its own land, in 11 plots. The group 4 household does have an obvious advantage with a

[13]The examples are those closest to the average given in Table 6.1.



Map 6.3 Land operated by 3 households, Fonogram 1988-89 *boro* season

wider spread of plots and more plots in better positioned land in terms of farming an HYV crop.[14] In a situation of fragmentation of holdings as occurs in West Bengal and Bangladesh, as well as other rice growing areas of South Asia such as are found in Tamil Nadu, matters such as land position and degree of fragmentation are crucial in determing benefits from irrigation, as will be seen below.

6.4.3 Physiography and soil

Farmer also notes as important in the quotation above soil, physiography and depth of flooding. How do these affect Fonogram land operation? Map 6.4 shows estimates of soil types, land heights, and the yearly cropping pattern of land operated by Fonogram households by physiographic zone. Information for this Map was gathered from detailed discussions with several local farmers as well as personal observation and the plot to plot survey. Information on land heights was also found in the Land Revenue Office which maintains *khashras* (or part of the records of land holding) for land, under two headings, *danga* (or high land) and *sali* (or low, *aman* paddy land).

Land height in particular determined crop choice by farmers. The area in which Fonogram households operated land sloped gradually from south to north (i.e. from the bottom to the top of the Map), so that the land near to the graveyard was about one *hat* (or hand, from the elbow to the top of the fingers, about 45 cms) lower than the land to the south of the village, and the land to the north of the map, in Bogra and Sohempur mouzas, was one *hat* lower than land around the graveyard. At the same time, land to the east and west of the Map, in physiographic zones 1, 5, 6 and 7, was 15 to 30 cms higher than the land to the centre in physiographic zones 2 and 3. The effect therefore was as if a river had cut a bed through the centre of the Map and left banks on each side, before widening into physiographic zone 4.[15]

Soil type was less variable than land height. All of the land in Map 6.4 was classed locally as *etel* of which there were two types, *kaloo* and *lal* (or black and red). These can be taken as the *kala matal* and *ranga matal* noted for 24 Parganas by O'Malley (1914: 109) as the characteristics of the soil described by O' Malley and Fonogram villagers are similar.[16] Red soil was more clayey and retained more water than black soil. *Boro* paddy farming and the farming of most vegetables was best on red soil, a point on which O' Malley and the Fonogram villagers agree. Black soil was friable and fertile (a 'stiff black

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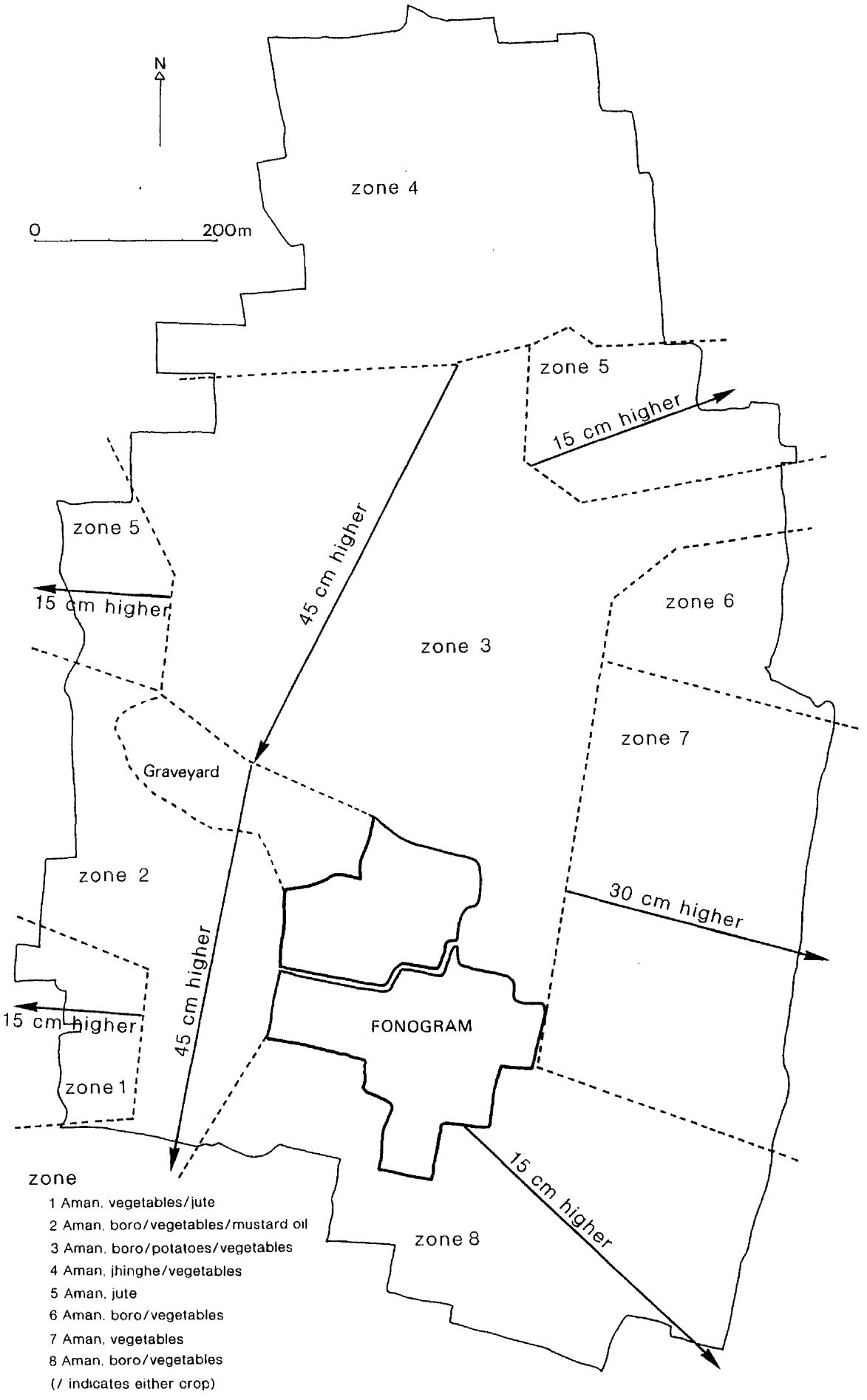
[14]Total land operated by income groups under crops grown in the 1988-89 *boro* season is given below in Map 6.7.

[15] Which may have been the case in the past. The skeleton of a crocodile was found when a grave was being dug in the graveyard, suggesting past fresh water there.

[16]O'Malley's soil typology is also followed by Mitra (1953: 130).



Map 6.4 Land heights and physiographic zones, Fonogram 1988-89

clay' as O'Malley termed it) and could be used for growing most crops. On Map 6.4 black soil is located mainly in physiographic zones 3,4, 5 and 6, while in the other zones to the south of the farming land there was a mixture of black and red soils.

The annual cropping pattern engendered by this height and soil regime is also found in Map 6.4. The main crops grown were *aman* and *boro* paddy, jute, vegetables (including potatoes, carrots, *jhinghe* [17]) and mustard. *Aman* was grown throughout operated land, and *boro* in mainly in the lower lying physiographic zones 2 and 3.

The mix of land heights and soils revealed a complex ecological system within a relatively small area which to the eye seemed almost flat and monotonous. To the south of the graveyard the height of the land was a protection against flooding during the monsoon, when land here generally flooded to the depth of one *hat* . On the farming land to the north of the graveyard flooding was deeper, up to the *kurmo* (small of the back or 90 cms.) and occasionally the *bukh* (the chest or 120 cms.), despite the less retentive nature of the soil. Villagers said that boats could sail on this lower land during the monsoon. Greater retention of soil moisture due to flooding also meant that *boro* farming was superior here. Differences in flooding heights partly determined choices of rice and other crop varieties. The main *aman* paddy varieties used were *bolda* (suitable on high land) and *ashpal* (suitable on lower ground). The main *boro* varieties used were *IRRI* (farmers couldn't say which IRRI types) and *ratna* (which produced a finer grain than *IRRI*).

This difference in land height could have dramatic effects on yields. In the 1987 *aman* season there was serious flooding in physiographic zones 3 and 4, to the north of the graveyard, due to monsoon rain. Standing water was in places above chest height and the crop was seriously damaged. In early December as they harvested their yields from these overflooded areas, farmers estimated that they were harvesting only three or four *maunds* of paddy a *bigha* , or about one half of normal average yield. By contrast, farmers in the relatively higher physiographic zone 2 were also harvesting their paddy and said that their yields were average, at about 8 *maunds* of paddy a *bigha* , although there had been a slight shortage of water. Within a distance of 50 metres there was a great difference in yield. This is further evidence why households chose to spread their landholdings throughout land operated by the village, and why households with larger holdings have an added advantage in owning a greater number of plots.

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[17] *Jhinghe* is *Luffa acuntangula* .

6.5 Cropping patterns and adoption rates in the *boro* crop seasons, 1986-7 to 1988-89.

I now move to cropping patterns to begin the analysis of how the introduction of irrigation facilities benefitted Fonogram income groups. Lipton has commented (1989: 206): 'At present IARCs (international agricultural research centres) and other researchers know little about how MVs affect, or are affected by.... distribution of land.' The information in this section is therefore intended to add to the existing knowledge in this area, and as much of the debate on the green revolution (section 6.2.2) concerns adoption rates, these will also be discussed here for comparative purposes. The information in this section was gathered from three sources: the first round questionnaire survey of the village; the plot to plot enumeration over three consecutive years of land operated by Fonogram households and other land receiving water from the *samity* facilities; and records at the local Land Revenue Office. A three year survey was carried out because findings from any one year might have been unrepresentative. The findings from the 1986-87 and 1987-88 seasons are not considered in detail here because by 1986-7 a general cropping pattern had developed that was similar in the following two years. Nor were there large variations in tenancy arrangements, so that the data considered for 1988-89 can be taken as representative of a three year period.

6.5.1 Institutional factors and crop choice

Prior to the introduction of the samity's STWs, land had been irrigated by private pump sets run on diesel (see Map 6.1), and from ponds or tanks. These were owned almost exclusively by larger landoperators in income groups 3 and 4. A reconstruction made with farmers of cropping patterns for the period prior to the 1985-86 *boro* season showed that the crops grown were vegetables, mustard oil and wheat. Crops in physiographic zones 3, 4 and 6 needed little irrigation to grow vegetables, particularly *jhinghe* , because of the amount of moisture retained in the soil of these zones after the monsoon. Land was not therefore left fallow during this season prior to 1985-86.

Farmers substituted paddy for former crops during *boro* for a number of reasons. The paddy crop potentially offered higher profits, at on average some 800 rupees profit a *bigha*, than the previous crops the profits from which ranged from 300-600 rupees a *bigha*. *Jhinghe* was potentially very profitable, but, as one farmer put it, something of a 'lottery'. There was also the novelty of growing a new type of rice, and the fact that consecutive *aman* yields had been poor and stocks of rice low, and households wanted to eat home-grown rice. Poorer households were also forced to try and maximise profit, and therefore became more 'compulsively involved' in the market (Harriss 1982: 162). In addition, the *samity* restricted the supply of water of each STW to an area of 17 *bighas* , only 46% of

their capacity of about five hectares, to stop disputes between farmers about theft of water.[18]

Loans for farming were available from the local bank, organised through the *samity* , at 12% per annum interest. Sixteen households took institutional loans for *boro* farming in 1988-89, organized either through the *samity* or directly with a local bank. These loans totalled 42,700 rupees. They were divided in this way: 6% to income group 2, 74% to group 3, and 20% to group 4. Not all households could avail of such loans, as land was usually necessary as collateral. However, loans were also available from relatives, urban money lenders and the local shopkeepers, and lack of credit did not appear to stop poorer households farming *boro* paddy (see below). Income group 4 households also had access to substantial credit from other sources, as they had more urban connections, or richer relatives. For example, Romesh Ali's household had borrowed an estimated 100,000 rupees, half of which had come from government loans that had enabled him to buy two lorries and start a transport business. One of the other members of the *samity* , from household 141, had taken a loan of 35,000 rupees from his father-in-law in order to build a new house. These dwarfed most of the other loans in the village.[19]

6.5.2 Adoption rates of HYV paddy

Maps 6.5 and 6.6 show the cropping pattern on land operated by Fonogram households for *boro* 1986-87 and 1987-88, as well as land under paddy farmed by non-Fonogram households. Under the *samity* regulations, the STWs irrigated only paddy. Paddy was being grown around the STWs, located mainly in physiographic zones 2, 3 and 8, that is in a lower lying area central to the land operated by Fonogram households, rather than the peripheral higher land. The exception was the STW just to the south of the Fonogram village boundary. The only rationale for the positioning of this STW seemed to be the existence of land in its immediate vicinity owned by two of the wealthiest Fonogram households who were also members of the *samity*.[20] Elsewhere, in the other physiographic zones, households continued the past pattern of growing a mix of vegetables with a scattering of wheat and fallow plots. A small percentage of plots were also cultivated under different types of trees or bamboo.

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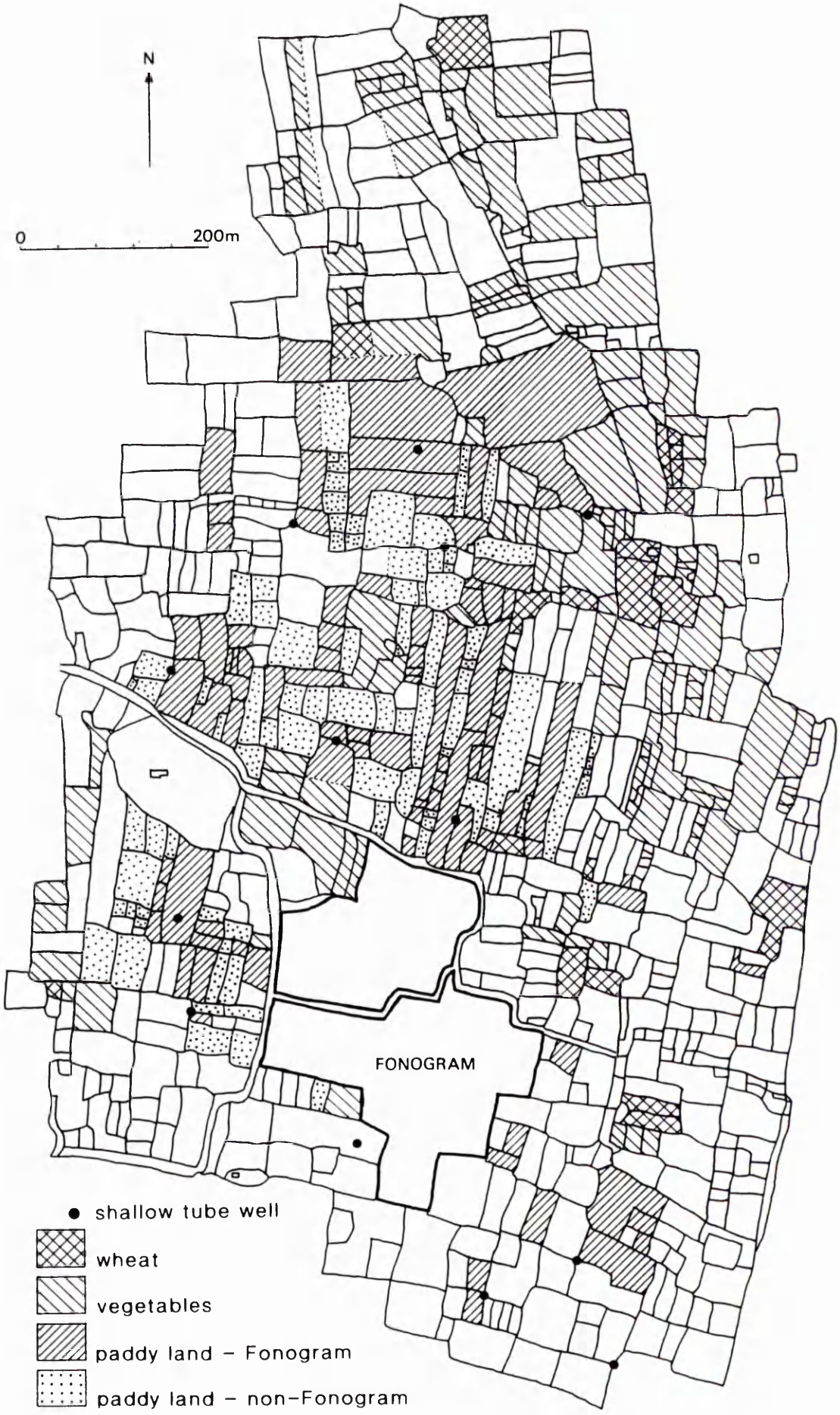
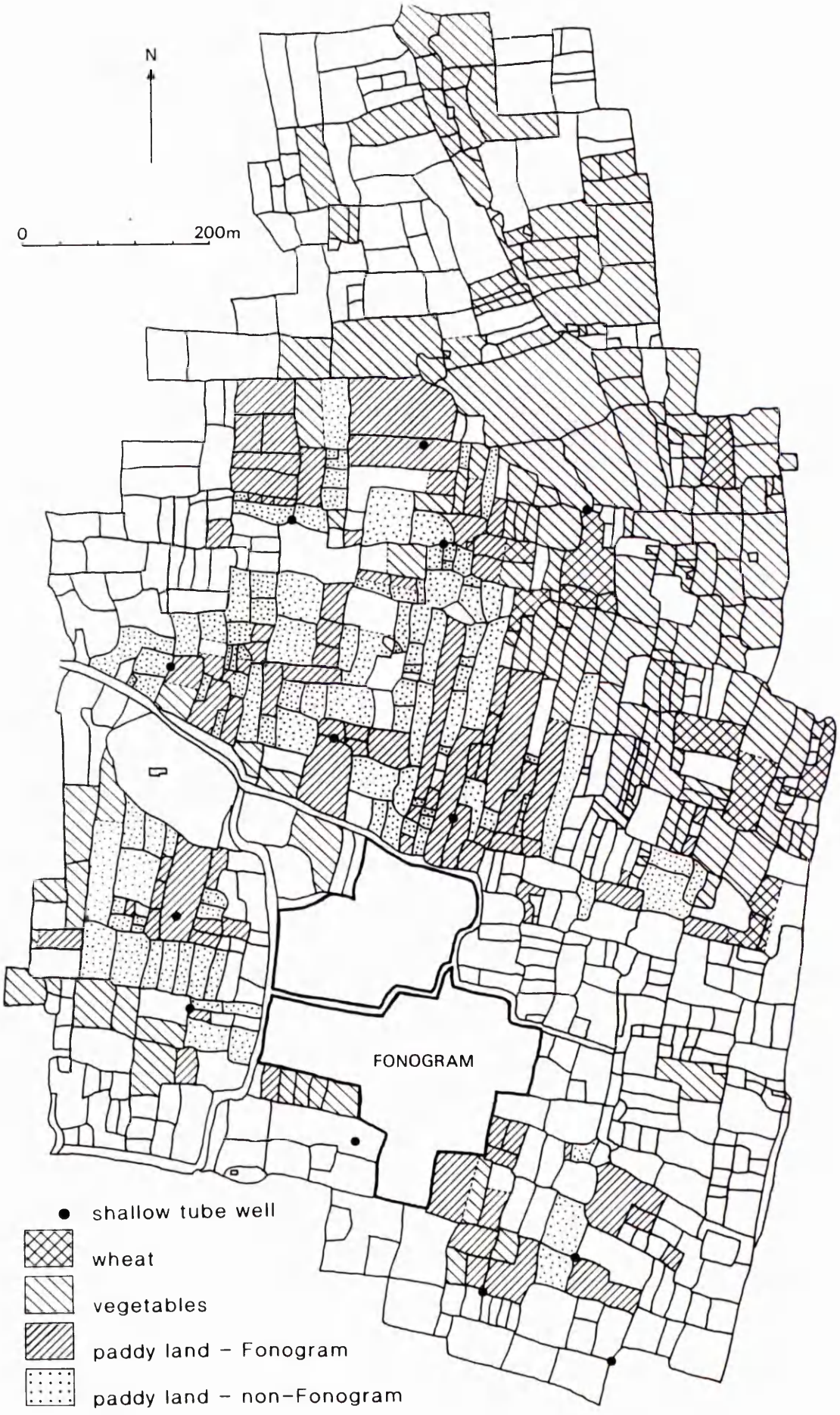
18 Such limitation is common throughout West Bengal. Boyce (1987: 242) quotes Government of West Bengal figures published in 1978 which estimated average STW capacity utilization at about 55%.

19 Loans taken by poorest households are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

20 The most southerly STW on the Maps did irrigate paddy, but not that operated by Fonogram villagers, and is therefore not shown.



Map 6.5 Cropping pattern, Fonogram 1986-87 *boro* season



Map 6.6 Cropping pattern, Fonogram 1987-88 *boro* season

The cropping pattern remained very similar for the 1988-89 *boro* season to the two previous seasons, with one exception. Two of the STWs on the borders of Bogra and Sohempur *mouzas* had been repositioned in more southerly positions, as can be seen from a comparison between Maps 6.6 and Map 6.7. These pumpsets had originally been positioned on and close to Romesh Ali's land in Sohempur *mouza* . As I discovered only at the end of my field work that the STWs were to be repositioned it was not possible to ask Romesh the reason for this. However, it was probably related to the fact that there had been no paddy farming around one of the STWs in the 1987-88 season (Map 6.6), and also that the STW actually positioned on Romesh's land had been stolen in 1987. This shift in the STWs meant a shift in land under paddy, and the land formerly under paddy reverted to vegetables. Both of the STWs moved on to land owned by another member of the *samity* (in household 139), showing again the *samity's* control over the resource.

Land under paddy owned by Fonogram households is shown in Map 6.7 by income group. For purposes of clarity a separate Map, 6.8, shows land under paddy hired in by Fonogram households as well as land owned by absentee landlords.[21] The area under paddy can be seen to cover a similar area as in the 1986-87 and 1987-88 seasons. Other crops grown in the 1988-89 season were also similar to the previous two years, and have not been represented in map form. Details shown in Map 6.7, as well as details of other crops grown by Fonogram income groups on their own land, can be found in numerical form in Table 6.2.[22]

Table 6.2 Crops planted on owned land by income group - Fonogram, *boro* season 1988-89 (1)

Income group	Land owned by crop (decimals)					
	paddy	wheat	vegs.	garden	fallow	total
1	151(37)	-	189(47)	34(8)	34(8)	408
2	449(47)	-	325(34)	68(7)	115(12)	957
3	1141(38)	8(-)	1702(52)	136(4)	241(7)	3228
4	1906(38)	111(2)	2384(48)	139(3)	433(9)	4973
Total	3647(38)	119(1)	4600(48)	377(4)	823(9)	9566

(1) Rounded figures in brackets in the first four rows are percentages of total land owned under the particular crop by the income groups.

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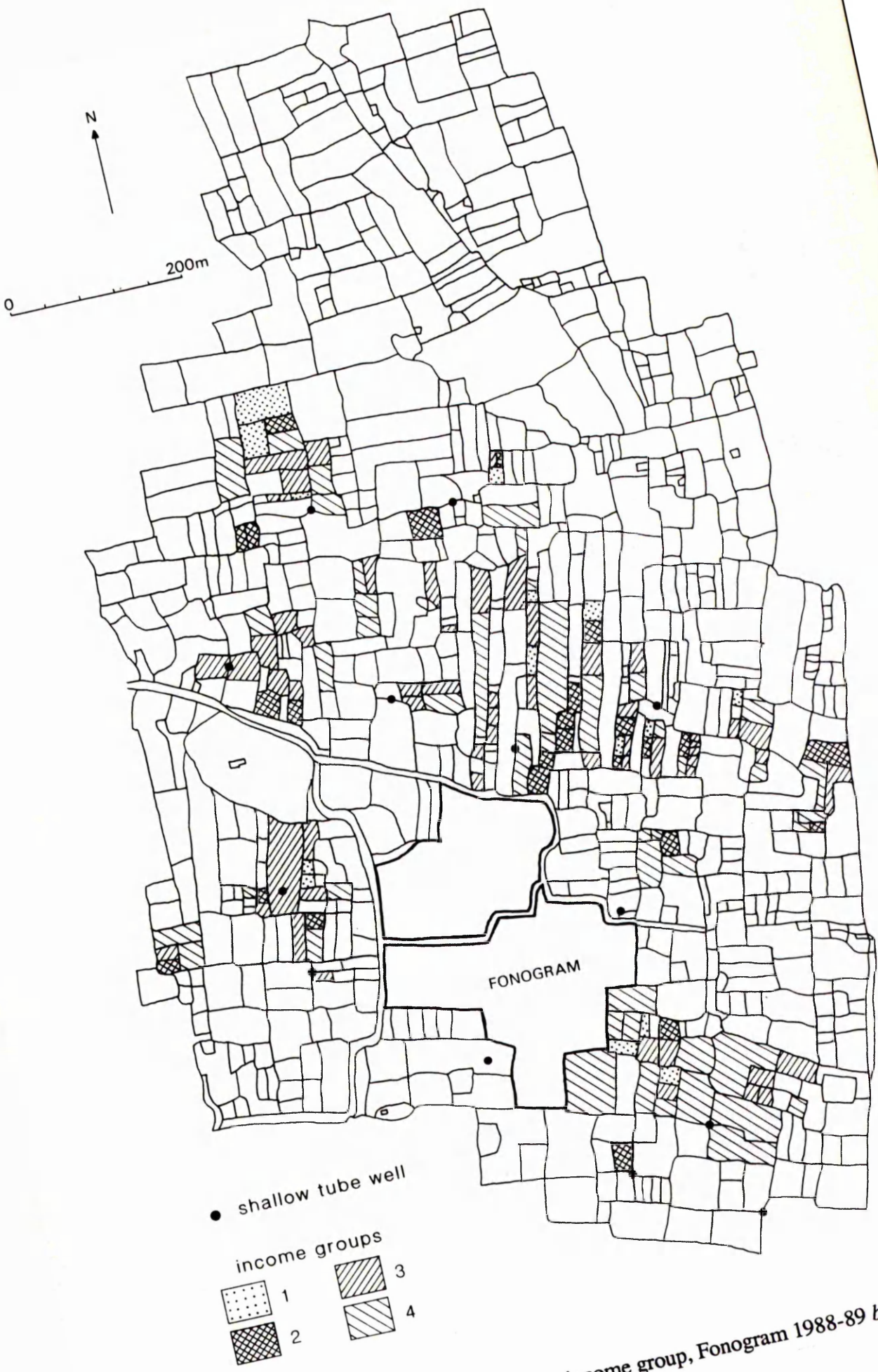
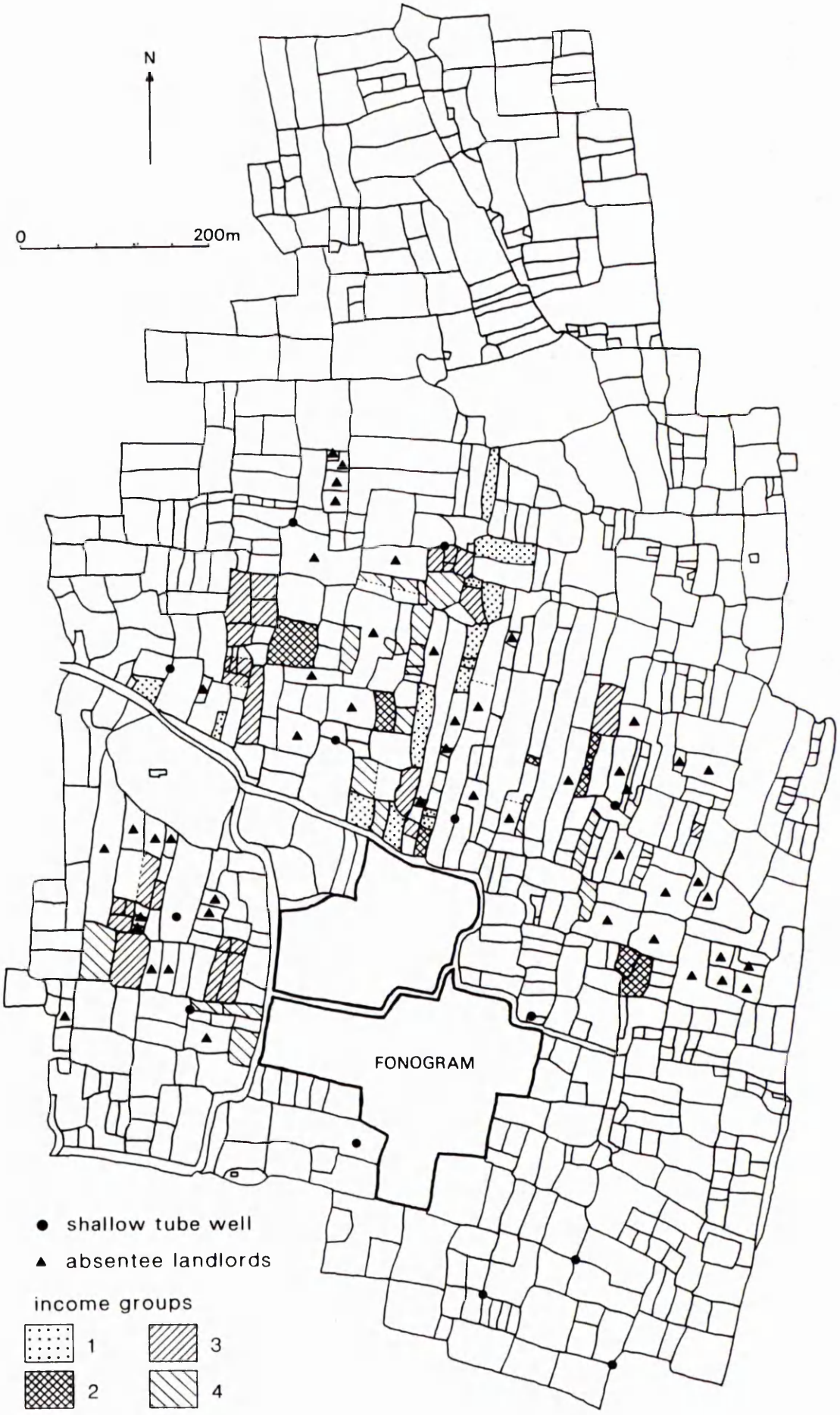
[21]For a definition of 'absentee', see chapter four.

[22]The Maps do not show 5 bighas of land under vegetables that lay at some distance from Fonogram. This is included in the Tables below.



Map 6.7 Land owned under paddy by income group, Fonogram 1988-89 *boro* season



Map 6.8 Land under paddy hired by Fonogram households, and operated by absentee landlords, 1988-89 *boro* season

Given the scattering of plots noted above, the finding that all income groups had similar percentages of land under paddy (as well as other crops) has important implications. If wealthier households have land distributed evenly throughout the various types of land operated by a village, they will receive a disproportionate benefit from irrigation facilities wherever they are positioned. The findings here therefore support the comment by Chambers *et al* that (1989: 94):

> Where....(irrigation) group members have some land, ...the location is critical. Much depends on topography and the distribution of landholdings. It can be difficult to serve only SFs and MFs (small farmers and marginal farmers) where their holdings are interspersed with those of larger farmers as is often the case in water-abundant areas....

Table 6.2 is complemented by Table 6.3, which shows in numerical form details of land hired by Fonogram households, as represented in Map 6.8.

Table 6.3 Crops planted on land hired in by income group - Fonogram, *boro* season 1988-89 (1)

Income group	Land hired in by crop (decimals)		
	paddy	vegs.	total
1	335 (69)	147 (31)	482 (18)
2	413 (48)	447 (52)	860 (31)
3	553 (65)	296 (35)	849 (31)
4	317 (56)	245 (44)	562 (20)
Total	1618 (59)	1135 (41)	2753 (100)

(1) Rounded figures in brackets in the first two columns are percentages of all land hired by the income group. Figures in brackets in the third column show percentages of total land hired in by each income group.

Percentages of land hired under paddy were more uneven than for land owned, with groups 1 and 3 in particular adopting a high percentage of HYVs.

Adoption of HYVs was not therefore restricted to richer households. In terms of amount of land operated, income group 2 had planted a higher percentage of its own land under paddy than any other group, while group 1 had the highest percentage of land hired in under paddy. Including both land owned and hired, percentages under paddy for the 1988-89 season were:

Income group 1 - 55%
Income group 2 - 47%
Income group 3 - 42%
Income group 4 - 40%

Clearly, it was the two lower income groups that had planted more of their land under paddy. This is consistent with much other evidence, summarized by Lipton (1989: 120): '....the *proportion of land* that adopting smallholders sow to MVs is frequently higher than for adopting large farmers.'

As can be seen from Tables 6.2 and 6.3, by 1988-89 the irrigation facilities introduced by the *samity* had made a significant difference to cropping patterns. Before the introduction of the STWs no Fonogram households had grown HYV paddy in the *boro* season; by 1988-89 some 40% of all land operated by Fonogram households was under paddy. Fonogram *boro* season farming had been 'green revolutionized'.

6.5.3 Land under paddy in relation to total operated village land

To consider only the proportion of land operated by each income group relative to their own holding gives a partial picture. The other relevant consideration is the proportion of total land under any particular crop. To consider equity as well as efficiency means discussing the amount of total new gains from the green revolution to different income groups or classes. This can be done by calculating percentages of total land under *boro* paddy owned and operated by each income group.[23] Total land under paddy operated by Fonogram households in the 1988-89 boro season was about 20 hectares. Of this total, the amount operated by each income group was:

Income group 1: 9%
Income group 2: 17%
Income group 3: 32%
Income group 4: 42%

Between them the two richer income groups therefore operated 74% of land under paddy, a similar figure to the 78% of total village land operated by the two groups. As well as this, about 70% of land operated by income group 1 and 50% of land operated by group 2 was land hired-in, which meant that profits from their crop would have to be shared with the land owner, whereas the respective figures for groups 3 and 4 are 32% and 14%, giving the richer groups a further advantage.

It may be worth recalling the claims made by RDC. It stated that: '.....almost (the) entire area can very conveniently be brought within the command of shallow tubewells....'

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[23]This does not account for yields, discussed in section 6.7, nor cumulative benefits, considered in 6.7 and 6.10.

and that: 'The area was previously mono-cropped but now the beneficiaries have been able to raise more than one crop on the same piece of land.' These claims are evidently mistaken; the command area of the STWs was restricted by their positioning and by the *samity* ; they were placed on lower ground and did not therefore irrigate higher cultivated land; and even after the introduction of the STWs households continued to crop vegetables as they had already been doing, and to transfer land previously under other crops to paddy. The RDC also claimed that most of the cultivated land in the area was: '....owned by the weaker section families of the marginal and small farmers....', and it added that '....while the irrigation facilities will be concentrated in the lands of the small and marginal farmers, some land of more affluent farmers will also have to be covered in the group irrigation scheme.' These comments reveal a failure to grasp the land operation system in Fonogram, as almost all cultivating households fell within the RDC categories of 'small' and 'marginal' farmers. It was the land of the relatively more 'affluent' in the village, in income groups 3 and 4, who had taken disproportionate advantage of the irrigation facilities, and who operated 74% of land under paddy.

6.6 Tenancy and absentee landlordism

6.6.1 Tenancy

Tenancy and absentee landlordism were two structural features of the agrarian economy identified in chapter four, where I also discussed the government's approach to securing sharecroppers' rights through *Operation Barga* . This section examines the importance of these two features in Fonogram in 1988-89, and shows how they must be taken into account when considering the agrarian structure. In keeping with the aim of this chapter, this section does not consider the question of efficiency concerning tenancy relationships (discussed in Boyce 1987: 213-228; Jones 1984).

As seen above (Table 6.3 and Map 6.8) about 11 hectares of land were hired in under sharecropping tenancy relationships. The only crops grown on hired in land were paddy (59% of the total) and vegetables (41%). Land hired in made up about 22% of all land operated during the season, similar to the 16.5% figure for all West Bengal in 1981 (Boyce 1987: 225).

Of this land hired in some 90%[24] was hired in from absentee landlords. Of the 10% rented between Fonogram households, or some 10 *bighas* (about 2% of land operated by the village), income group 4 hired out about 72%, dominating this resource. Access to

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[24]A similar figure to the 81% found by Kohli (1987: 130) in his survey of 300 households in 24 Parganas, Birbhum and Midnapore Districts.

intra-village hired in land was unequal; group 2 hired in about 50%, and group 3 33%, with only 6% hired in by group 1.

6.6.2 Absentee landlordism

Absentee landlords owned some 9.7 hectares hired in by Fonogram households.About 31% of this land was hired in by Fonogram income group 3, 29% by group 2 and 22% by group 4, so that group 1 (with 18%) had least access to this resource. Fifty nine per cent of this land was under paddy. The standard hiring arrangement for land under paddy was that the sharecropper provided all inputs, including the cost of water, and gave the landowner a fixed rent of three, or more usually four, *bastas* of paddy per *bigha* farmed (one *basta* is equal to 60 kgs), about a third of total average yield. This was above the legal maximum of 25% of yield for rent set by the Government of West Bengal. Also, as rents were set and yields were not, risk was firmly in the sharecroppers' hands. The need to raise extra capital for farming the expensive *boro* crop meant that it was likely that lower income group households hiring in land would become more 'compulsively involved' in moneylending markets.

In addition to land hired out, absentee landlords also owned other land within the command area of the *samity's* STWs which was being farmed under paddy in the 1988-89 season (see Map 6.8). This land accounted for about 44 *bighas* , or 6 hectares. This land was farmed by labourers, sharecroppers and cultivators from villages other than Fonogram. Absentee landlords therefore benefitted significantly from the introduction of the STWs, with a total of 12 hectares under paddy in the 1988-89 season, equivalent to one quarter of the total Fonogram holding, of which 6 hectares were operated by Fonogram villagers. Who were these absentee landlords?

About 60% of the land hired out to Fonogram households belonged to four families. The largest landholding (three and a half hectares) belonged to four brothers who lived locally and who came from one of the wealthiest and most powerful families in the area. Two of the brothers owned local factories in which Fonogram villagers, and in particular women from the poorest households, were employed at exploitative rates of pay. The oldest brother, G., also ran a business in Calcutta, involving among other things the export of shrimps, and boasted to me on numerous occasions about his wealth. The brother of one of the members of the *samity* , a competent and hard working farmer from an income four household, with whom I also spent much time discussing farming matters, was, according to one Fonogram villager, 'in and out of G.'s house'. The comparison between G.'s lifestyle and that of the poorest of Fonogram could not have been greater.

The second of these four absentee families, owning two hectares, consisted of three brothers, one of whom acted as surveyor for the local Land Revenue Office. The third family, owning three hectares of land, were local traders and businessmen. The fourth were 'cultivators' (to use the term they described themselves with) who lived adjacent to Fonogram and sharecropped out their two hectares of land. They were not as well off as G.'s family, but were as wealthy as Fonogram income group 4 households.

Other absentee landlords included a sweet shop owner and other local businessmen from Dabu. There was also one landowner who lived in Calcutta who sharecropped out half a hectare of land on a 60:40 basis throughout the year to an income group 2 household, an arrangement that had been in place for many years.

Almost all of these landlords were Hindus renting out land to Muslims, continuing an exploitative pattern that dates back at least to the 1830's (see chapter four on rural unrest by Muslims tenants against Hindus landlords in the Fonogram locality during that decade). *Operation Barga* had had no effect in Fonogram; records at the local Land Revenue Office in 1989 showed that no *bargadars* from Fonogram had been registered under *Operation Barga* . Adjacent Muslim villages had fared no better, although in two nearby Hindu villages of a similar size to Fonogram there were a total of 48 *bargadars* registered. This situation prevailed in Fonogram despite sharecropping arrangements that had continued for at least two generations, and several cases of land operated by *bargadars* for three consecutive years, which under the terms of the post-1977 amendments to the Land Reforms Act qualified them for registration and security of tenure. When I asked *bargadars* why they did not register they had a simple answer - they did not want to go through a procedure that might lead them to future trouble and conflict with landlords, and possibly to the law courts where cases might drag on for several years, as had one local case.

Evidence of the persistence of absentee landlordism throughout West Bengal was given in chapter four, although the handful of studies that have touched on the subject should not be taken as representative. There does not, however, appear to be any general recognition of the extent of land owned by absentee landlords. For example, Boyce's (1987) otherwise comprehensive review of the agrarian structure in West Bengal does not discuss absentee landlordism, nor is it mentioned in a recent survey of land reforms in Bangladesh and West Bengal (Siddiqui *et al* 1988). However, any rural development initiative in the state needs to take into account the fact that a relatively large percentage of land in the command areas of irrigation facilities could be owned by town dwellers or local rich absentee landholders. There was certainly no recognition of this in the RDC project proposal (Appendix 6.1a), and therefore no recognition that most of the sharecropped land operated by Fonogram

villagers, as well as a significant amount of other land under paddy and within the effective command area of the *samity* STWs, was owned by wealthy outsiders who for the most part had other, substantial sources of income.[25]

6.7 Benefits of the green revolution to different Fonogram groups

This section extends the discussion in section 6.5 by examining the absolute and relative[26] benefits accruing in monetary terms to different income and occupation groups in Fonogram, and begins a discussion on relative returns to agricultural labourers. A brief review of relevant literature can be found in Section 6.2.4. The methodology here follows that of calculating 'factor shares', or shares of income to different sections of the cultivating population, used by Howes (1985). Howes' work refers to deep tube wells and handpumps in Bangladesh, but his method remains relevant; he calculated total value created by a *boro* paddy crop in his Bangladesh study village, and divided this among different class-occupations into which he had stratified the village (ibid.: 92-110).

As the RDC proposal and reports on the STWs used the categories 'farmers' (or cultivators) and 'labourers', these will be used here along with the income group categories employed in this thesis.

6.7.1 Returns to cultivators and labourers

To carry out an analysis of factor shares, it is first necessary to find out relative inputs to cultivation by different parties. Average costs of farming one *bigha* of *boro* paddy, based on estimates of Fonogram farmers, are given in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4 Average costs of farming one *bigha* of *boro* paddy, Fonogram 1988-89 (1)

Item	Cost (rupees)
Preparation of seeds	50
Ploughing(6 days)	180
Transplanting(9 days)	108
Fertilizer/Pesticides	170
Weeding(6 days)	72
Spraying(2 days)	24
Water	300
Cutting(5 days)	60
Carrying/Threshing(12 days)	144
Total	1108

(1) The labour wage rate estimated is two rupees an hour

[25]Harriss' findings in Tamil Nadu, where there was virtually no absentee landlordism in the area studied, suggests the dangers of trying to generalize from a single village study (Harriss 1982: 112-13).

[26]'Absolute' here means in relation to one's own income, 'relative' in relation to the income of others.

The Table shows the maximum cost of farming; actual costs were generally lower. This was because a part of the labour involved in cultivation was provided by household members. Also, households might own their own bullocks and therefore not have to pay hire charges for animals for ploughing. The Table does not show the costs of the boiling of rice; farmers did not include this cost in their estimates because it was carried out almost exclusively by the women of their households (thus making obvious the value they put on women's labour). It was outside of the scope of this thesis to estimate household input to cultivation. However, an estimate from a major survey in Bangladesh (Hossain 1989: 45), which will be used here, has suggested a division of labour for the *boro* paddy crop into three fifths from household labour and two fifths from hired labour.[27]

Discussions with cultivators while they were farming and in the evenings (which probably provided more accurate information than the more formal responses to the first round questionnaires) suggested average yields of 13 *bastas* of paddy a *bigha* for the *boro* crop, or a similar number of *maunds* of milled rice.[28] Given an average market price[29] of 3 rupees 50 paisa per kg. over the year, production in monetary terms per *bigha* by households owning land under *boro* paddy would have been some 1820 rupees, to which can be added 100 rupees for straw. Subtracting total costs from profits from yields gives 812 rupees (1920 -1108 rupees). For sharecroppers this profit was further reduced by the rent paid for hire of land, equal to 3-4 *bastas* of paddy, which meant that the rent ranged from about 330 to 440 rupees or approximately 50% of total profit.[30]

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[27]In the following analysis input from household labour is held constant across all income groups. The situation in the Muslim village Fonogram, where almost all households supplied labour on their own land, would be different from a Hindu village where the wealthier would not work manually.

[28]Production for one hectare would therefore be 3850 kgs of milled rice. This is similar to Ghosh's findings (1988: 886) for 100 farming households in Burdwan District in 1984-85, and Van Schendel's finding (1982: 221-2) in Comilla District in Bangladesh. Yields were found to be similar across all four income groups, although figures here for yields are not as accurate as figures for land operation.

[29]It was outside of the scope of this thesis to investigate the quantity and price of crops being sold at market. This question was subsumed in the first round questionnaire by the enquiry into the number of months home production lasted, the answer to which combined estimated income from crops sold and crops consumed. The local market price followed a common seasonal pattern of remaining low immediately after harvest and gradually rising to reach a peak during the monsoon. The market purchase price is used here, following Howes (1985: 98 fn 13), rather than the lower amount farmers received for sale of their produce, because most of the HYV rice appeared to be consumed within the household, and if households had not been farming paddy would have had to buy rice. It is recognized that this method over-estimates returns to poorer cultivating households who generally have to buy rice at higher market prices.

[30] As sharecroppers paid their rent directly after the harvest the calculation made here is in terms of rice sold at the market. If the price used had been rice bought at the market then the profit accruing to sharecroppers would have been even less.

Cultivation costs outlined in Table 6.4 can be separated into capital and labour costs in the following way; water, fertilizer, preparation of seeds, and pesticide costs (520 rupees) were constant for all households; the remaining costs (588 rupees) were to labour, and can be divided into 353 rupees to household labour and 235 rupees to hired labour. Returns from cultivation of HYV paddy were therefore unequal. The landowner received 812 rupees profit per bigha farmed while hired labour received 235 rupees for each *bigha* farmed. In addition, the landowner's profit returned to one household, while the return to labour was to several labouring households.[31]

6.7.2 Total returns to income groups

How do these figures for cultivators and labourers translate into total returns to income groups? Table 6.5 shows averaged income accruing to a single households from each income group from the *boro* crop in 1988-89 from both cultivation and employment.[32] Calculations in this Table take into account both profits from cultivation (based on the profit from the amount of land under paddy operated by each income group divided by the total number of households in the group); and extra income from employment (based on the numbers in each group whose main source of income was agricultural labour divided by the total number of households in the group). While these calculations are approximate, the Table does give sufficiently accurate estimates to allow a general discussion.

Table 6.5 Average returns to Fonogram income group households from the 1988-89 *boro* paddy crop (rupees)

Income group	Land owned (1)	Land operated (2)	Employment(3)	Total(%)
1	73	81	132	286 (6)
2	276	127	125	528 (12)
3	906	219	62	1187 (25)
4	2468	205	10	2683 (57)

(1) Estimating 812 rupees a *bigha* profit.
(2) Estimating 406 rupees a *bigha* profit.
(3) Estimating 192 rupees per hired labourer (16 days extra work at 12 rupees a day), adjusted for numbers of labourers per household.

[31]For returns to individual labouring households, see section 6.8.1.

[32]Note that this is not the extra income created but total income, a distinction not always made in studies of factor shares (Prahladachar 1983: 937). Prahladachar has surveyed studies of factor shares concerning the switch from traditional to HYV paddy which are not comparable to the situation discussed here.

This Table supports the evidence presented in Section 6.5 that a disproportionate amount of the income created from the *boro* crop has accrued to the higher income groups. Income groups 3 and 4 have retained the relative advantage that control over 78% of operated land allowed them; between them they gained 82% of the total income from the *boro* paddy crop. In particular, the 19 households in group 4 can be seen to have gained 57% of this income. The fact that even income group 1 households received more benefit from cultivation than labour shows both the profitability of the HYV crop and the low relative returns to labour. An income group 4 household on average gained over nine times more income from the crop than a group 1 household.

6.8 Benefits to agricultural labourers, the non-agricultural poor, and perceptions of the poorest of the green revolution

As noted above, the literature on the green revolution has not focussed on its effect on agricultural labour, who were the main group targetted in the RDC's project proposal. The effects on the non-agricultural poor, and their perceptions of agricultural change, have been studied even less. This section discusses the benefits that accrued to these two parties, and in particular the perceptions of the 25 poorest households whose lives were the main focus of the field work in Fonogram.

6.8.1 Agricultural labourers

Thirty households with agricultural labour as their main source of income were located in income group 1, and a further 26 in group 2, making up 86% of all agricultural labour households in the village. Households with agricultural labourers as the main income earner were asked in the first round survey how many extra days of hired employment they received from the HYV crop. The reply was standard - 15 to 20 extra days. In this case the return to a household with one labourer would have been between 225 and 300 rupees per *bigha* farmed (at 15 rupees for a full day, which is how the labourers estimated earnings, rather than the half day estimated by employers).

Were these estimates accurate? Given a total of 157 *bighas* of land cultivated by Fonogram under HYV paddy in the 1988-89 season, and a total of 40 days labour per *bigha* of crop, of which two fifths, or 16 days, would have accrued to hired labourers, 2512 days of hired labour were provided by the paddy crop. If the HYV crop had replaced no other crop, then the total amount of hired in labour provided would have been 27 days to each labourer (with 93 individuals in Fonogram with agricultural labour as their main

source of income).[33] However, for the most part the *boro* paddy crop replaced a vegetable crop. Estimates of labour days required for different vegetable crops ranged from 38 days a *bigha* for potatoes to 30 days for *jhinghe* to 12 days for carrots and beet, and the extra labour provided by a paddy crop depended on what had been grown previously; the agricultural labourers' estimates can therefore be taken as accurate.[34]

Agricultural labourers might also have benefitted from higher wage rates, more labour on non-paddy land where cropping changes had taken place due to the STWs, more employment from villages adjacent to Fonogram where households were growing HYV paddy with irrigation from the STWs, or more employment from non-agricultural sources arising from the general small scale industrialization in the area of which the STWs were one part. These factors are considered below.

Wages in the Fonogram area during the *boro* season, at 2 rupees an hour in 1988-89 were high as compared to other parts of West Bengal. For example, wage rates for men in the Midnapore study villages and in Birbhum District were about 25% lower than the Fonogram figure (and even lower for women). The higher level in Fonogram was probably partly caused by the prevalence of cash cropping in north 24 Parganas in the *boro* season for many decades before the introduction of the STWs, which meant a higher demand for labour in this season than in the mainly mono-cropped Midnapore study villages. On the other hand, there was virtually no agricultural labour organization in Fonogram, as opposed to the informal organization found in both Birbhum and Midnapore villages. The absence of formal or informal labour organization in Fonogram was probably a result of the homogeneous nature of the village in terms of religion and caste, as opposed to the more heterogeneous nature of villages visited in Midnapore and Birbhum, which included tribals and scheduled castes. Using figures from Kynch (1990: Table 3.1 and 3.13) for the price of rice in the whole of 24 Parganas District, and using this as a deflator,[35] the increase in the real wage rate during the 1980's in Fonogram suggested that the introduction of the STWs had had little effect on labourers' wages. In 1981-2 the average rate was

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[33]This figure includes 83 individuals who had agricultural labour as their main source of income and another 20 individuals who had agricultural labour as their secondary source of income and were counted as half time labourers. Most other sources on the increase of employment due to the green revolution (discussed in 6.2.3 above) either do not give figures or discuss increased employment from traditional or local paddy to HYV paddy, and so are not comparable with this study.

[34]A 'before' and 'after' analysis of land use would have enabled a more accurate analysis of extra days labour provided by boro paddy. It was not possible to carry out such an analysis during the course of this study, although a reconstruction was made of the pre-*samity* STW situation.

[35]Kynch (1990: 2-7) details why the price of rice is the best indicator for the construction of a consumer price index, given the data base available in West Bengal.

approximately 8-10 rupees for an 8 hour day, in 1984-5 (the season before the functioning of the STWs) 12-13, and in 1987-88 14-15 rupees (the source for these figures is discussions with agricultural labourers and records of the NGO for which I worked). Adjusting these figures against the price of rice, with 1981 as the base year (and taking an average figure of 9 rupees as the wage rate in 1981-2, 12.5 rupees in 1984-5, and 14.5 rupees in 1987-88), the real wage rate for 1984-5 was 9.8 rupees and in 1987-8 9.9 rupees.[36]

Fonogram agricultural labourers did not gain from increased agricultural employment outside of the village. The 'moral economy' posited for West Bengal by Bardhan and Rudra (1986) and Rudra (1982), and supported by much micro-level evidence from India (Dreze and Mukherjee 1987), whereby agricultural labourers are employed almost exclusively within their home village because of the importance of village contacts, held for Fonogram.

It is not possible to say given the data collected whether there was increased employment on non-irrigated land subsequent to the introduction of the STWs (which occurred in a Bangladesh village studied by Glaser (1988: 64) after the introduction of group STWs). However, comparing the reconstruction of the pre-STW situation with the cropping pattern in 1988-89, it did not appear that the cropping index was much higher in the later year, although this conclusion is based on impressions rather than a plot to plot survey of the earlier period.

6.8.2 Non-agricultural poor

Some non-agricultural employment was created by the introduction of the STWs, and by the general small scale industrialization taking place locally. This employment was mainly labouring on lorries, which involved five income group 1 and three income group 2 households. A team of six to eight labourers worked on these lorries loading and

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[36]The trend noted in Fonogram may be representative of a wider pattern, although there is conflicting evidence concerning this. Kynch (1990) notes for the whole of West Bengal that there have been a general downward trend of male wages in terms of their rice equivalents since the early 1950's, although this trend was partly reversed between 1977 and 1987, a factor Kynch attributes to the policies of the Left Front Government (ibid.: 33). Jose, on the other hand, over a similar time period but using a different methodology to that of Kynch, and considering the relations betwen new agricultural technology and the real wage rate, found in West Bengal only a decline in male agricultural wages, in common with most other states of India (Jose 1988: Table 10a; A-54). Lipton (1989: 186) has also commented from a survey of relevant literature (not including Jose's findings, however) that: 'MVs seldom raise real wage-rates'. General discussion of long term changes in wage rates in West Bengal can also be found in chapter four.

unloading bricks, sand and earth, and it was only the stronger labourers who were employed for these arduous tasks. The wages for this employment were between 20 and 25 rupees a day, onto which was added *par routi* (leavened bread). In Fonogram, Romesh Ali owned two lorries (bought after the introduction of the STWs), and one lorry was owned by a another member of the *samity* (from household 139). Fonogram villagers did not tend to work on these lorries, because of the tension this caused between the lorry owners and the labourers. One Fonogram labourer complained bitterly that he was owed for several days labour by Romesh, which he was unlikely to ever receive. He, like the other Fonogram villagers, worked on lorries owned outside the village, and Romesh hired in external villagers, suggesting that new forms of extra-village employment contracts were being established. Romesh and the other lorry owners may have seen this as a way of maintaining an acquiescent labour force and keeping the wage rate down.

There was little other evidence found in Fonogram over the three periods of fieldwork of 'trickle down' to the non-agricultural poor, a possibility hypothesized by Mellor (1976: 94, 182). Factories had opened up in the area, including bakeries to provide bread for the factory workers and others, and one member of a group 1 household had got a regular job in one of these bakeries. There were also more grocery and tea shops opening, and a boy from another group 1 household had a job in one of these tea shops. There were, therefore, a few limited gains, which were nevertheless significant for individual households. However, employment in local factories was at an exploitative wage rate and in unpleasant and sometimes dangerous working conditions. It should also be remembered that one wealthy family of absentee landlords owned the local factories in which the Fonogram household members found employment; it was not in the long term interests of these factory owners that poor households in Fonogram receive substantial benefits from agricultural technology, as this would have meant a possible loss of local sources of cheap labour.

6.8.3 Perceptions of the poorest on the green revolution

When asked what they had gained from the green revolution, poorest respondents (interviewed in the second round survey) said that they received a little more work, although one respondent thought that farmers were generally using their own labour to farm the *boro* paddy crop. A female respondent thought that: "People who are farming paddy might be happy with it. Those who are farming it are going to get richer whereas the poor can't farm."

Neither was there much evidence of 'trickle down' to this poorest group from their richer neighbours. This may have been because of the general hardship faced in the village, partly caused by consecutive damaged *aman* crops, although richest households were

experiencing previously unparalleled wealth. None of the 25 poorest households, reported receipt of *zakat* , or post-harvest donations of grain, which usually takes place from the rich to the poor in Islamic societies (e.g. Scott 1985: 169-72). They said that such donations may have taken place in the past, but now no-one ever heard of them.

Nor were poorest households able to glean after the *boro* crop, which might have provided them with an important source of subsistence (see chapter seven); according to them, the HYV paddy husks did not fall as easily as those grown during the *aman* season, leaving little left for them to pick up. And, as mentioned above, post-harvest processing work was not passed on to poorer households, but carried out mainly by the household which grew the crop. As one female respondent put it: "There is no more work after the harvest in terms of processing. People will sell paddy in the market and buy rice rather than give work to the poor." Another woman expressed this anti-rich feeling more vividly: "If we asked for rice-processing work the rich would say 'Go off and die!' - they wouldn't give us any paddy to process."[36]

Apart from watching their neighbours get richer, the green revolution passed the poorest by. As one woman, a factory worker, said: "I don't know anything about farming - I go out to work at seven in the morning and come back at eight at night." Poorest people agreed almost unanimously that the rich were getting richer and the poor poorer, and that they were not the people receiving benefits from the new irrigation facilities.

This analysis shows that RDC's objectives were not met. To recap, according to RDC: 'The main object of the (STW) proposal is to assist the landless agricultural and other landless labourer families....' and 'This project created a good impact among the target group of population .... thereby extending avenues for landless labour families.' Agricultural labourer families certainly did benefit from the STWs. They received an extra 225 to 300 rupees in wages for each worker. Given an average agricultural labourer yearly wage of 2700 rupees, the absolute increase to a single labourer was about 10% every year, no doubt welcome to the individual households. However, this gain was small compared to that of a household from income group 3 or 4 with six *bighas* under HYV paddy which was making a total profit of about 4900 rupees and an extra profit (over previous non-HYV crops) of 1500 rupees in a single season. In percentage terms of their own total incomes, the returns to the different income groups were less extreme. However, poorer villagers did not think only in percentage terms of incomes. They were involved in daily

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[36]There may have been some benefits to poorest people in that the paddy crop may have produced a larger amount of stubble than previous vegetable crops, allowing more material for fuel collection and grazing of animals. No data was collected on this matter. The class dimension of poorest people's comments is discussed in chapter seven.

relations with other villagers, both economic and extra-economic. They looked at the improvement in the standard of living of the *samity* members and the other richer villagers, and compared it to their own.

Bitterness and anger was the outcome, and more detailed discussion of the views of the poorest can be found in the chapter seven.

6.9 Land sales, land mortgaging, and partial proletarianization

The foregoing discussion has dealt with benefits from the STWs in a static sense; it has not discussed the process of change that ensued as a result of their introduction. This is covered in the present section, although the discussion is limited by the shortness of the period of fieldwork in comparison to the length of time that is usually taken by large scale social change.

Section 6.2.5 discussed theories of differentiation that have been used by academics to analyze social change, and quoted Dasgupta's hypothesis, since modified by others, that the HYV package leads to greater differentiation, an increase in the number and proportion of landless households, and partial proletarianization. These issues will be discussed with reference to land sales and mortgage arrangements in Fonogram.

6.9.1 Land sales

During the plot to plot surveys details were gathered of land sales to and by Fonogram households between 1986-87 and 1988-89. Land exchanges between Fonogram income groups are given in Table 6.6.

Table 6.6 Land exchanges between Fonogram income groups, 1986-87 to 1988-89 (decimals)

		Buyer			
Income group	1	2	3	4	Total
Seller 1	-	-	27	-	27
2	4	-	-	63	67
3	-	35	5	85	125
4	-	-	5	33	38
Total	4	35	37	181	257

In total, 257 decimals of land changed hands between Fonogram households for the three year period, or just under 2% of land operated by the villagers. There was a clear movement of land towards income group 4 households, who bought 70% of all land sold. About 83% of all land sold was sold to a higher income group. About half of the land sold and bought was between relatives, which adds an interesting perspective to the idea of sale of land being an exploitative transaction.[37]

Sales also took place between Fonogram households and other villagers or absentee landlords, details of which are given in Table 6.7.

Table 6.7 Land sales between Fonogram income groups and non-Fonogram households, 1986-87 to 1988-89 (decimals)

Income group	Land bought	Land sold
1	-	6
2	9	106
3	96	-
4	261	33
Total	366	145

Another 511 decimals therefore changed hands between Fonogram households and outsiders. A clear pattern emerges from Table 6.7 with income group 4 households buying in 71% of land and group 2 households selling 73% of land involved in transactions with outsiders.

Group 4 therefore bought 57% of total land bought from within and outside the village (and sold 9% of total land sold); total transfer of land to this group was 371 decimals, or 7% of land owned by this group in 1988-89. Group 2, the income group with a substantial amount of land at risk (group 1 owning only a very small amount of land), sold 173 decimals over the three year period, buying in 44 decimals, a net loss of 129 decimals. While not a significant figure in comparison to total land owned by Fonogram households, this amounts to some 18% of land held by this income group in 1988-89.[38] This is

[37]'Relative' here means a close relative, i.e. a sister, brother, aunt, uncle, niece or nephew or first cousin (many Fonogram households were related in a more distant sense). Details of pre-1986-87 land sales that were collected for occasional plots support the idea that a large percentage of land sales were between close relatives. A reason for this may be that in times of particular hardship, when households would be expected to sell land, a relative may give a better, if still below market, price than a non-relative. Intra-family land sales in Bangladesh are also discussed, as a negative phenomenon, by Jansen (1986: chapter 4), Howes (1985: 70) and Cain (1981: 465).

[38]For similar findings from a Bangladesh village, see Cain (1981).

particularly serious given the importance of land as an asset and the hardships suffered by poor households to retain or acquire land (see chapter seven). Each land sale by poorer households probably involved several months of cuts in consumption prior to the sale, the disappearance of an inherited and vital resource, and decline towards landlessness.

There is therefore evidence that subsequent to the introduction of the STWs land transfers disproportionately benefitted income group 4, and to a lesser extent group 3, although the amount gained by group 4 was not great compared to their existing holding. Of all land bought by group 4 households, 56% was bought by three households. One of these (household 139) was in the *samity* , and of the other two (households 127 and 135), one had a nephew in the *samity* and the other had benefitted significantly from the introduction of the STWs.

Can land sales in Fonogram be termed 'exploitative'? Thirty per cent of land bought by group 4 was from wealthy absentee landlords, who probably sold when convenient for them at the market price. However, the consecutive poor *aman* crops during the period of fieldwork increased pressure on poorer households to sell assets, and some of this pressure, as I heard during the interviews, came from wealthier relatives within the village. Data gathered on the price of land sold shows that income group 3 and 4 households were not paying lower than market prices for land, which may have been due to the general scarcity of land in the area as well as the occurence of intra-family sales. 'Exploitation' as a term to describe land sales in Fonogram has therefore to be defined carefully; wealthier households were taking the opportunity to buy land, but were not paying lower than market prices for it.[39] On the other hand, land prices were increasing markedly in the area, particularly that land located nearer to either a road or an STW. For example, half of PN 491 (Map 6.1), making up two *bighas* of land, had been bought in 1979 for 6,000 rupees a *bigha* . In 1986 it was sold at 9,000 a *bigha,* and was in 1989 estimated to be worth 20,000 a *bigha* .[40] This rise in prices meant that it was unlikely that poorer households would be able to remain in the land market except as sellers, but also that they would receive very high prices for their land.

It was outside the scope of this thesis to gather accurate data on land sales before 1986-87, so it is not possible to state whether or not land transfers increased after the introduction of the STWs. It is possible to say that since their introduction land has mainly

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[39] A qualitatively different system of land sales operated in the Midnapore study villages, where past land sales by tribals to non-tribals were seen as exploitative by the sellers.

[40] A rapid rise in land prices was confirmed by the examination of ten land deeds held by the institution for which the author previously worked, as well as discussion with Fonogram household members and other local people.

moved towards those who have also gained most benefit from the STWs, and away from the households in the income group most likely to become landless. The amount of land changing hands was small, in comparison to total land owned in the village, which suggests that land scarcity regulated the land market.

6.9.2 Land mortgaging

Studies from two villages in Bangladesh with a comparable socio-economic structure to Fonogram identified land mortgaging as an essential feature of the rural economy (Howes 1985: 64-5; BARD 1976: 140-1). The second of these studies found that 43.5% of households owning land had some land mortgaged out, and that: '....mortgaging ....represents the principal device by which land is transferred between households in the village.' Mortgaging (i.e. land given from one household to another for hire over a negotiated period for a fixed cash sum) was not found to be of such importance in Fonogram (nor in the two Midnapore study villages, where it hardly existed). Table 6.8 shows the distribution of outstanding mortgaged land between income groups in Fonogram in 1988-89.

Table 6.8 Outstanding mortgage transactions in Fonogram, 1988-89 (decimals)

Income groups		Mortgaged in 1	2	3	4	Total
Mort-gaged out	1	3	8	42	21	74
	2	9	-	-	-	9
	3	-	10	6	104	120
	4	41	28	-	6	75
Total		53	46	48	131	278

Table 6.8 shows that, as opposed to land sales, mortgage transactions did not in general involve the movement of land from poorer to richer households. Almost 40% of intra-village transactions involved land mortgaged from group 3 to group 4, and a further 20% involved land mortgaged in by group 1 households, although 34 of the 53 decimals mortgaged in by group 1 households came from one group 4 household, a close relative.

In addition to the 278 decimals noted in the Table, a further 53 decimals were mortgaged in from a non-Fonogram villager by a group 1 household, and 24 decimals

mortaged out to an absentee landlord by a group 3 household. Most of the transactions had been made during or just before the period of field work. The total land in mortgage amounted to a little under 3% of land operated by Fonogram households, although this figure hides the relative importance to the poorer income groups of this supplement to their access to the resource base.

It may be useful at this point to clarify the nature of these mortgage arrangements. All were referred to by respondents as *bonduk* (the Bengali for mortgage), but many of the more recent transfers, particularly those from richer to poorer households, resembled land hiring arrangements. In these arrangements a fixed sum, usually 500 rupees a *bigha* , was paid to the landowner for use of the land for one year. If this capital was not repaid then the land would continue to be used by the household now farming the land. There was sufficient evidence of return of mortgaged land to the original owner after one or two seasons of this arrangement to support the supposition that land transferred in this way was temporary and did not involve loss of land. This was also supported by the fact that mortgaged land was almost exclusively under paddy in the 1988-89 season. This was in contrast to mortgage arrangements which pre-dated the field work period, which generally involved the transfer of land to the richer 'mortgagee' because of inability on the part of the poorer original landowner to repay the capital. Present day mortgage arrangements with transfers of land from richer to poorer households appeared to be a means by which richer households raised cash, and were carried out at their convenience. Land moving from poorer to richer households, however, appeared to follow the previous pattern of households being unable to repay capital and therefore eventually losing land. A good example of the latter is household 41 from income group 1 which had five small parcels of land in mortgage, totalling 32 decimals; it appeared that all of these parcels would eventually be lost.

Reverse tenancy, or the hiring out of land during HYV cultivation from poorer to richer households, has been posited as a means of transfer of wealth to richer households (Boyce 1987: 243; Byres 1981: 430; for West Bengal, A. Bandyopadhyay 1981; N. Bandyopadhyay 1975). As seen above, this was found on only a minor scale in Fonogram.

These results on mortgaging reveal the dangers of attempting to generalise from the findings of a single (or even triple) village survey. As Farmer suggests (1986: 191): 'Conclusions drawn and generalisations made at one point in time for a given area are not valid a few years later.' Features of the West Bengal or Bangladeshi agrarian economy such as mortgaging arrangements or the extent of absentee landlordism appear to have been

poorly covered in rural surveys, and until they are investigated more carefully, especially concerning their effect on socio-economic structure and the rural poor, it would be unwise to comment further, except in attempting to consider their effect on the power structure within Fonogram.

6.9.3 Partial proletarianization?

In this vein, this and the next section discuss the process of change occurring in Fonogram subsequent to the introduction of the STWs. In particular, this section addresses hypotheses made about gains to the rich and poor, and partial proletarianization, by various authors (see section 6.5.2 for details). As chapter four shows, processes such as increasing landlessness have been taking place in West Bengal for at least one hundred years, and structural features such as tenancy and credit arrangements have been present for at least an equally long period. It appears likely that recent developments such as the green revolution will intensify changes that were already in process.

Poorer households certainly gained more employment subsequent to the introduction of the STWs. They also cultivated a higher percentage of HYVs on the small amounts of land they operated than richer income groups. There was also little evidence in Fonogram of intra-village tenancy arrangements that would lead to sale of land. The ability of poorer households to rent in small parcels of land from absentee landlords and their ability to borrow locally increased their ability to retain their own land. Despite this, it did appear that poorer households were being forced to sell land to the higher income groups at an alarming rate.

There was also little evidence of 'poor peasants' establishing greater links to the market, despite the existence of a large town 12 kilometres from the village. Market links had already been well established in this area for well over one hundred years (see chapter 4). As Appendix 5.1a shows, there were only seven households in income groups 2 and 3 (where 'poor' peasants are most likely to be located) who both owned or operated land and had non-agricultural employment as their primary or secondary source of income.[41] In fact, it was households in group 1, who were mainly landless, who supplied the highest percentage of their labour for their income group outside of the village.

Urban links had increased, but mainly because of the efforts of group 4 households. The years subsequent to the appearance of the green revolution in Fonogram have been

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[41]Some poor peasant households may have held on to land by increasing work as agricultural labourers, as suggested by Bhaduri *et al* 1986; I do not have the data to discuss this.

notable from one particular angle - the increase in income and expenditure by those who can now afford it, particularly those in the *samity* . It is this which makes it obvious that the poor lost out relatively. Two households in particular, (households 139 and 140), whose head of household were members of the *samity* , had perceptibly increased their wealth, although others in income group 4 and the upper levels of group 3 had also done so less perceptibly. The first of these, Jyonal's household (139), has already been mentioned as a lorry owner. Jyonal was also the main purchaser of land during the field work period, and had bought a motor bike which was a conspicuous symbol of his wealth.

The second household was that of Romesh, and I have mentioned already his household's purchase of two hectares of land (before the field work period) and two lorries, and his access to large amounts of urban credit, as well as his brother's poultry business which involved urban connections. He had also repaired his house, but did not engage in any other conspicuous expenditure. He was rarely at home, spending most of his time in the local large town conducting his various business affairs, most recently the sale of bricks, tiles, earth and sand for building purposes.

Four other households in income group 4, whose heads were four brothers (households 129, 130, 138 and 141) had all also benefitted substantially; the eldest of these brothers, Daoud, came from the richest household in the village and was also a member of the *samity* . Daoud was involved in the division of land into housing plots near to Fonogram, as well as in sale of building material for this housing, from all of which he was likely to reap substantial profits, and which necessitated urban links. Daoud's family had also recently purchased a hand tractor which would not only cut costs but was a symbol of status. He and the second oldest brother had bought land in Fonogram from their friend the factory owner and absentee landowner G., and were at the end of 1989 both completing the building of large brick houses on the land which cost at least 50,000 rupees each.[42] These were in stark contrast to the shack of leaves and palm fronds owned by one of the poorest households in the village that lay in front of their new houses at the entrance to the village. This made visible and tangible the numerical advantage shown in Table 6.5.

The benefits from the STWs were only one reason for increased resources flowing to these *samity* households and their relatives; the development of their businesses involved them in contacts in the towns around Fonogram, with government offices and other businessmen, and borrowing of capital from local banks and moneylenders, as noted above. As others have commented (Howes 1985: 113; Harriss 1982: 196; Van Schendel

[42]Harriss gives a similar example from his Tamil Nadu study village (1982: 195).

1981: 277-8), increased wealth from the green revolution may not be invested only in land or agricultural development in the village, especially if the land market is competitive, as it was in Fonogram. The cases above show that it involved increases in consumption by the richest, and movement of capital into business enterprise outside of the village.

The idea of 'partial proletarianization' is supported by the evidence from Fonogram. This is mainly because poorer cultivators and agricultural labourers were gaining absolutely at the same time as losing relatively in comparison with their richer neighbours. This absolute gain did not appear sufficient to halt the sale of substantial amounts of land by poorer households. The precise overall flows of overall comparative resources to different income groups, and therefore the degree of increased differentiation, are very difficult to ascertain, although sections 6.5-6.9 and Table 6.5 above do attempt to measure these flows from the STWs.

6.10 Fonogram power structure and the green revolution

Before the introduction of the STWs, an unequal social structure had become established in Fonogram. This involved effective political and economic control of the village by a small number of wealthy households, located in income group 4 and the upper levels of group 3. Those 'controlled' were the marginal land operators and landless households mainly located in income groups 1 and 2, who made up most of the population of the village. As noted in chapter four, this situation is common throughout the moribund delta of West Bengal. It was into this power structure that the irrigation facilities were introduced. Lipton has noted (1989: 401): 'MVs are an evolutionary technique..... not one that requires (or stems from) a transformation in the structure of rural power. An evolutionary technique ....tends, when introduced into an entrenched power structure, to be used so as to benefit the powerful.' I will summarize how this has happened in Fonogram.

While poorer cultivators and landless labourers did gain from increased employment and uptake of HYVs, it was richer households which received the main benefits, if relative shares of the gains from the *boro* HYV crop are considered (Table 6.5). The land of wealthier income groups was held in a greater absolute number of parcels than that of other income groups, so that wealthier households were able to take greater advantage of land heights, soil types and spatial position of land than other groups. The scattering of holdings of the higher income groups meant that the power structure in the village had imprinted itself on the surrounding landscape, and that the wealthier would have benefitted disproportionately wherever the STWs had been positioned. Gains from sharecropping

were less unequally distributed than those from land owned, but this did not disturb the general pattern. Wealthiest households were also gaining by buying land and through urban links.

It is possible to concur with a number of other studies from the region that have come to similar conclusions concerning benefits to the poor from the HYVs within a situation of increasing inequality (Boyce 1987: 238-9; Howes 1985; BRAC 1983: 115-22; Hartmann and Boyce 1983: 132; Van Schendel 1981: 79; Arens and Van Beurden 1977: 123); [43] Given this finding, the financing of irrigation facilities in isolation from other development programmes must be questioned.

Another group that benefitted significantly from the green revolution were wealthy absentee landlords who owned and operated a large amount of land within the effective command area of the STWs, thus continuing an historical pattern of control of resources in Muslim villages by Hindu outsiders. Absentee landlords were not investing these gains in agriculture. There was also evidence of co-operation between richer Fonogram households and absentee landlords.

The claims by RDC concerning the success of the irrigation project are unfounded. The project had the opposite effect to that intended by its funders, which included the Government of West Bengal, because of a failure to understand the nature of the rural socio-economic structure or of irrigation technology. RDC were also unaware that the area to be covered by the STWs was already double-cropped, and benefits to all parties was limited by this. This form of external intervention into the village was a failure as far as delivering major benefits to the poor was concerned, although some benefits did seep through.

Dasgupta's conclusions from a survey of all-India data were also found to hold in Fonogram (1980: 379):

> Rather than undermining the existing rural institutions by bringing about a radical transformation in the agricultural scene, the new technology has strengthened those and the groups in control of those institutions. Whereas it was a difficult political task to antagonize the rural elite before, it is even more difficult today as the former is now deeply entrenched in power in the Indian countryside.

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[43]Wade's (1988) detailed study of farmer groups in south India also shows that wealthier farmers are able to organize to control irrigation resources. It should be noted, however, that some forms of mechanized irrigation may be more equitable than others (see Glaeser 1988; Boyce 1987: 228-245; Howes 1985; Jones and Ahamad 1985: 24; Wood 1984).

The original aims of the propagators of the green revolution of maintaining social structure (section 6.2.1) have been met. From this point of view, the aims of the 'reformist' government in West Bengal, as identified in chapter four, have also been met, in that substantial resources have been transferred to village leaders who are likely to ensure continued support to the CPM.

Although governments may be increasingly unwilling to antagonize rural elites, antagonism has come from other sources. Boyce (1987: 241) cites a reference to the sabotaging of deep tube wells in Bangladesh. This also occurred in Fonogram. Three STWs were stolen during my fieldwork, one from a plot of land owned by Romesh's household just before they were to begin irrigation (all were insured and subsequently replaced). The power lines that brought electricity to Fonogram were also stolen, which meant delays in irrigation. That this was an antagonistic act rather than simple theft can be seen from its regular occurrence during the *boro* season when the STWs were mainly used.[44] The perpetrators of these acts remained anonymous. There had also been several attempts at theft from Romesh's house, and during one of these attempts at night the perpetrator had broken the wooden slats in a window and put a hand through and pulled the first thing that came into it - which happened to be Romesh's wife's hair. The building of brick houses by richer Fonogram households was for protection as well as for comfort or to display increased wealth. As discussions with them showed, richer households were frightened of theft and violence. One conversation held shortly after the theft of one of the *samity's* STWs is representative. In December 1987 I was talking to a household member from one of the richer households as he irrigated his household's fields with their diesel pump set. The sun began to set and he made clear his fear of robbers, even though the village was only a few minutes walk away.

Although other households, particularly in income group 4 and the upper levels of group 3, did benefit substantially from the STWs, the *samity* members had gained most conspicuously. External resources entering into the village were therefore mediated by the village socio-economic structure, and benefits mirrored the existing structure, with the wealthiest, those in the STW *samity* , gaining most, and the non-agricultural poorest least. Chambers (1983: chapter five) has written of 'integrated rural poverty', or an interlocking set of factors that 'trap' the poor in deprivation. In Fonogram 'integrated rural wealth' was found, with power, wealth, good health and contacts, particularly urban contacts that could be extremely lucrative, integrated to ensure for a select few households control of village resources.

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[44]Comparison can be made here to machine breaking in Britain in the 1830's as a protest against new agricultural technology (Hobsbawn and Rude 1985).

It would be both naive and ahistorical (given the discussions in chapters three and four concerning peasant protest) to suggest that the relative polarization of income of richer and poorer households noted in Fonogram would be likely to cause increased violence between the rich and poor in the village. What it did appear to be leading to was continued bitterness among the poor, and more 'everyday forms of poor people's resistance', part of the friction that was integral to everyday village life.

6.11 Conclusions

The analysis above and in Appendix 6.2 shows how resources entering the study villages do not pass into a political vacuum. Resources are mediated by existing socio-economic structure, and, dependent on the type of programme, their use mirrors to a lesser or greater extent structures of 'integrated rural wealth'. In Fonogram it was clear that the introduction of irrigation facilities reinforced existing structures and distorted them further in favour of those who already had much power in the village, and who were likely to gain both more power and wealth. In comparison, in the different agro-ecological setting in the Midnapore villages (Appendix 6.2), while a large quantity of land was distributed widely to all income groups under the government land reform programme, most of the land was of poor quality, and the socio-economic structure was similarly reinforced, if less strongly than in Fonogram; nevertheless, the boost in morale involved in receipt of redistributed land by the poor, a factor not present in Fonogram, should not be under-estimated.

The analysis in this chapter has shown the importance of understanding the local ecology and its relation to socio-economic structures when formulating rural development programmes. In Fonogram, failure to understand this on the part of the implementing agency meant failure to meet the stated aims of its programme.

The programmes evaluated in this chapter and Appendix 6.2 were of direct relevance to this thesis as they both involved attempts at rural development 'targetting' the poor. Poorest people's own strategies for reproducing their livelihoods are the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Survival strategies of the poorest in the case study villages

7.1 Introduction

In chapters two and three I discussed the importance of analysing the interaction of agency and structure in the study of poverty. Chapter two discussed the narrow and presently dominant focus on the economic measurement of poverty. The present chapter draws its inspiration from a different tradition, that of people's history, discussed in chapter three. Work in this tradition has attempted to show how poor people have been active participants in the making of their societies. There is now a small literature focussing specifically on theorising survival strategies (e.g. Lieten and Nieuwenhuys 1989; Schmink 1984; Wood 1981), but I would argue that the most sound existing theoretical tradition for a study of poorest people's survival is the work discussed in chapter three.

Chapters four, five and six have set the context for the present chapter by describing the socio-economic and structural relations in the case study regions and villages, and how these determine the likely direction of benefits from rural development programmes. The analysis of socio-economic structure or class was seen as central to any attempt to study rural poverty, because power is integral to village life, and therefore also to the poorest person's experience.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline critically the activities and perspectives of 60 poorest households in the case study villages, and how poorest people go about living their lives and manage to survive, even during periods of stress and natural disaster. In other words, the focus here is poverty as experienced by the poor, and poor people's agency. I argue that, in contrast to historical and contemporary representations, poor people are active and ingenious, given the constraints of the socio-economic structure. This has implications for policy, for, as seen in chapter two, the view taken of the poor will partly determine the direction and content of policy.

Survival strategies can be taken to mean activities of poor people in times of stress which they see as crucial to the continued running of their household. This chapter will consider such strategies, which constitute indigenous methods of resource use. It suggests that indigenous methods already in place in rural societies, negotiated over time and via class and socio-economic structures, might provide useful media through which governments and NGOs could support the activities of the poor. To build on these

strategies might therefore be a useful complement to existing development programmes, and would involve acknowledgement of the poorest as active. This recognition would appear to be crucial in the formulation of a humane, sensitive, and possibly more successful form of rural development.

This chapter focusses on priority areas as defined by poorest households; that is, it concentrates on those areas prioritised by the poorest after serious flooding in the Fonogram area in 1986-87, as well as priorities that were later expressed in each of the villages by the poorest as to how they got by in times of stress. As a consequence of this, the relation between poverty and power is one main organising feature of the chapter.

The chapter is organised as follows. Section 7.2 discusses 'characteristics' of poor people, and outlines the method of selection of poorest households in this study. Section 7.3 deals with poorest people's use of the natural resource base, and section 7.4 with poorest people and food. Section 7.5 discusses 'sharerearing' of livestock, and section 7.6 poorest people's use of assets. Section 7.7 considers credit, and the broader areas of politics and power, the 'moral economy' and mutual support. Using Anderson's terminology, the main forms of agency discussed are 'private' and 'public'; the strategies disucssed can also be divided into those that are shorter term and everyday, such as gathering of CPRs, or longer term such as building up of assets or formation of mutual support networks. Throughout, comparative material is used to draw out the representativeness of my findings, and the two agro-ecological study regions compared.[1]

In contrast to chapter six, which concentrated on the formal village economy, agriculture, irrigation, and the world of men, this chapter is mainly concerned with the village 'informal economy', which is operated to a large extent by women. Repressive patriachal structures operated in the study villages at every level and to differing degrees within and outside the household (see chapter four). In considering women's work, this chapter will incorporate an analysis of the operation of patriachal structures, as the original focus of this thesis also intended to include a focus on gender.

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[1]There is now a large literature on survival strategies, much of it on Africa. Much of this literature has concentrated on famine rather than everyday forms of coping.

7.2 Agency and the characteristics of the poorest

7.2.1 Who are the poorest?

B. Harriss (1987) has noted that there have been two main indicators used in deciding who is poor in studies of micro-level poverty in India. These are wealth and capability.[2] Using these indicators various authors have analysed data from rural surveys in a way that is relevant to defining poverty groups and comparable to the findings of this thesis. For example, Agarwal (1986: 195-7) has noted for all India that the poor are likely to be found in agricultural labourer households, have large households and high dependency ratios and low literacy rates; Dreze (1988b: 33) has noted the high percentage of widows without working sons in ultra-poor groups in villages in West Bengal, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh; Hossain (1987: 38) has commented on lack of homestead land as an indicator of ultra-poverty in six villages in Bangladesh; and Greeley (1982: 137) has noted that poorest households in Bangladesh have female household members participating in the wage labour market.

The most comprehensive attempt to differentiate the poor from the poorest has been that of Lipton (1983a, b, c and 1985). The paradigmatic base underlying this attempt, and Lipton's theories concerning nutrition, have been discussed in chapter two. Lipton's other papers concern the relation between poverty and land, demography and labour. There is no scope to discuss the very detailed findings of these papers here, nor would it be relevant to do so, given their mainly economic analysis (for a brief summary, see Chambers 1988: 6-7).

I will not at this point attempt to outline further comparative material, useful as that exercise might be. The focus of this chapter is not on who the poor are but what the poor do and say. Rather than 'labelling' the poor, or attributing to them particular characteristics, I instead discuss what the poor are capable of, a fundamentally different venture from poverty measurement.

The use of the work 'capable' here is in contrast to the narrow definition of 'capabilities' used by Sen (1985) (see chapter two), where capabilities are discussed in terms of indicators such as mortality or literacy. Sen's choice of indicators would suggest that he is more interested in people's lack of capability that their abilities. This also accounts for Lipton's negative attitude (1983b: 10):

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[2]The shortcomings of the paradigmatic base of both of these indicators has been discussed in chapter two.

> The poorest are usually likeliest to be ill...., to lack extended family to help with child-care...., to be casual employees...., and to be subject to seasonality.... . Hence a downturn in ASPRs (age- and sex-specific participation rates) around the level of ultra-poverty....would be perfectly normal economic behaviour.

I have no criticism of the substance of these findings (in fact all except the last are widely known and were found in my own investigations). My criticism is that attempts to label the poor or ultra-poor in such a manner are negative; they concentrate on the inablity of the poor rather than their abilities, and therefore neglect human agency. Such definitions continue to take an attitude towards the poor as passive victims (of illness or 'subject to seasonality'), to be targetted by development policy makers.

This labelling of poor households by occupation has a further effect. To call a household an 'agricultural labour' household necessarily extracts this household from its social nexus. To say that 'agricultural labour households are likely to contain many poor individuals' says where poor people are likely to be located but not why they are poor; it says nothing about the relations of exploitation, power, or class friction that are integral to the life of an agricultural labourer, and which need to be included in the study of poverty if poverty is to be understood.

7.2.2 Selection of the poorest households in the case study villages

Technical issues, important as they are, become a central focus if the study of poverty is to concern measuring or labelling. They become less important if the purpose of the study is to illuminate processes and experiences of poverty. However, it is of course necessary to know who the poorest are to discover their capabilities, and the method of their selection in this study is described below.

During field work, poorest households were selected for interview using a combination of different indicators. As I required a purposive sample, random sampling techniques were not used. I needed to interview an adequate number of households to be able to discuss in general terms poorest people's agency, and a 20% sample appeared to be manageable. In Fonogram my local knowledge made access and selection more easy. The two Midnapore villages had been selected for study partly because of their scheduled tribe and caste populations, and most of the poorest respondents in those villages came from these populations. Physical indicators used in selection were lack of assets and income (calculated from the first round interviews), the state of housing and the health of household members. Other 'indicators' were the loquaciousness of respondents, and their willingness to go through what at times could be highly emotional discussions. Some households were excluded even though by any indicator they were the poorest in the

village. This was because household members were unable to answer detailed questions because of ill-health or mental incapacity. A further technique used was to ask each poorest household to name five other poorest households in the village. The same names came up regularly enough to suggest that this technique could overcome 'respondent bias' and be useful in identifying the poorest.[3]

The distinction between poor and poorest here is necessarily arbitrary. The purpose of the selection procedure was not to pinpoint accurately the 'bottom' 20% of households in each village, but to estimate who the poorest were as a means to discussing with them their experience, priorities and abilities.

To contextualize the following discussion, I describe here the 'characteristics' of respondent households. When carrying out the interviews I spoke to whoever was present in the household at the time(s) of visit, which, as intended, meant that more women were interviewed as they tended to be present more often. In Fonogram I spoke to 15 women, 3 men and 7 families (wife, husband and/or children), in Bithigram 4 women, 8 men and 7 families, and in Keshipur 11 women, 4 men and 1 family (in total 30 women, 15 men and 15 families). As mentioned above, interviews in Bithigram sometimes became group interviews. Respondent households included 7 female headed households in Fonogram, 3 in Bithigram, and 6 in Keshipur (all headed by widows). In contrast, there were 3 widowers in the sample. Power and gender structures interlinked with the result that it was households headed by single women with young children, or independent elderly widows, that were most likely to be poor.

Asset holdings of respondents are discussed below (section 7.6). Respondent households came from income groups 1 and 2. Twenty four out of 25 came from group 1 in Fonogram, 10 out of 19 from group 1 in Bithigram, and 12 out of 16 from group 1 in Keshipur (income group 1 being much smaller in the Midnapore villages). By primary occupation, Fonogram respondent households included 14 agricultural labourers, 4 lorry labourers, 1 maid servant, 1 van driver, 1 petty trader and 1 beggar; Bithigram households included 17 agricultural labourers and 2 contract labourers, and Keshipur households 11 agricultural labourers and 5 contract labourers. Respondents depended almost exclusively on their unskilled labour to earn income. All respondents except one were illiterate, and in only 6 cases were their children attending school.

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[3]Dreze (1988b: 24) came to similar conclusions about villagers' ability to determine who were the poorest, from a study in Uttar Pradesh.

Having outlined who the poorest were, I discuss in the next five sections the informal economy they operated and their survival strategies.

7.3 Access to the natural resource base and common property resources

7.3.1 Introduction

This section describes an 'everyday' strategy of the poorest that is intensified in times of stress or disaster - the use made by them of the local natural resource base. The areas that will be discussed here are the importance to the poor of gleaning, gathering of fuel, and gathering of other wild products.[4]

Most literature on common property resource (CPR) use in India focusses on the arid and semi-arid, hill and forest fringe regions of the country (for a review of relevant literature, see World Bank 1989). Little literature has discussed CPRs in West Bengal, and has done so mainly in the context of forests or social forestry programmes (e.g. Shah 1987; an exception is Nesmith (1990) who covers both social forestry and other natural resource use in West Bengal).[5] Part of the reason for the relative lack of attention on CPRs has been the focus in the region on formal aspects of agricultural development. Also, West Bengal does not have the relatively large areas of 'common' land that are found in other less densely populated regions of India. However, CPRs in West Bengal are of vital importance to the poorest.

In West Bengal CPRs need to be redefined as natural resource products that are found mainly on private rather than public land, controlled either by richer villagers or the government. In this context CPR use is often negotiated between rich and poor. Poor people may see CPR gathering as a natural right, while the owner of the land on which CPRs are found may see such gathering as an infringement of ownership. Examples of such conflict are given below.

The inter-class element of CPR use is largely absent from its current analysis in India (for example, it is not mentioned in either the World Bank review (1989), Jodha's much quoted articles (1990; 1986), or a major work on water and trees in India (Chambers, Shah and Saxena 1989)). 'Class' analyses have looked at access of different sections of the rural population to CPRs (e.g. Jodha 1986), but not the relations between the different

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[4]Discussion of collection of water, mainly carried out by women and girls from tubewells inside the villages, was outside the scope of this thesis.

[5]There is a more extensive literature on CPR use in Bangladesh, discussed below, e.g. Sadeque (1990), Howes and Jabbar (1986), Briscoe (1979).

sections of the rural population concerning CPRs.[6] Gleaning, as well as use of other CPRs, can however be seen as activities that express poor and usually landless people's symbolic claims on the land. As such, negotiation of CPR use fits into a wider pattern of conflict between rich and poor (see section 7.7).

Although most rural households make use of CPRs, collection of CPRs is more important the poorer a household becomes (Jodha 1986). The discussion below will highlight the importance of CPRs to the poorest, showing how the poorest use CPRs in the two different agro-ecological regions examined, and that use of CPRs is one area where the poorest are particularly active.

7.3.2 Gleaning

Paddy grains that fell during harvesting were collected by poorest household members after the *aman* harvest in all three study villages, but access and type of gleaning differed. Respondents were asked who gleaned, when they did so, how much they gleaned, and whether this activity was subject to any restrictions.

a) In Fonogram 17 out of the 22 respondents questioned reported gleaning whenever there was time, and that it was an activity carried out mainly by children. In the other five households there were either no children or respondents were out at work all day and unable to glean. The amount gathered was partly dependent on the overall yield of the crop. Respondents' replies were therefore coloured by the consecutive poor *aman* harvests in Fonogram; the floods in 1986-87 for example meant that very little grain was available for gleaning.

The amounts collected varied depending on household make up and who had time to glean. Respondents reported that on average children might go out for an hour a day in the 15 to 30 days when the crop was harvested and collect in total between 10 and 15 kgs. of paddy. The average collected by the 11 households who gave clear estimates was 13 kgs. in one season . The highest estimate was 25 kgs. for the season. These amounts can be compared to the 2-3 kgs. of wheat received by most respondent households after the 1986-87 floods from the government as relief.

Three of the 17 gleaning respondents said bitterly that farmers refused access to their fields (a point made by two other poor household members not included in the second

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[6]An exception is Briscoe (1979), writing about common property use in a Bangladesh village.

round survey). As one poorest woman put it: "If the crop is good the rich let us in, if not they don't."

b) In Bithigram 18 of the 19 respondents reported gleaning. Household members spent between half a day and a day gleaning during the harvesting period. Gleaning was usually carried out by women and children. Up to 5 kgs could be gathered in a day by one person (the equivalent of two female agricultural labourer's wage). For the gleaning 'season', total estimates varied between 15 and 80 kgs. Only one respondent reported restrictions on gleaning. She said that she was only allowed to glean on the land of the farmer whose paddy she harvested.

Seven Lodha respondents also reported another form of gathering of paddy grains - from rat holes. Rats made deep, long holes under the narrow *auls* (or partitions) between the fields. One respondent estimated that10 rats could store a maximum of 100 kgs. of grain in a single hole. The Lodhas dug up these holes, killed the rats, and took the grain. This work was very hard, which limited the numbers of those who could take part, and took a whole day. The average amount collected in a day's work by two men was about 6-7 kgs., although sometimes no grain was collected. Snakes were also a potential danger.

Collection from rat holes was an activity that benefitted both farmers and collectors. Farmers benefitted because rats were cleared from their fields, and the collectors benefitted from receipt of grain. Lodhas wishing to undertake this activity had to request permission from the field owner to do so, which was usually granted.

Grain collected by gleaning and collection from rat holes made a substantial contribution to poorest households' subsistence. Between them, respondents who gave clear estimates of the amount of grain collected in one season gained an average of 29 kgs. per household for gleaned grain and 32 kgs. for grain collected from rat holes. One household reported gathering a total of 100 kgs. a season in this way, the equivalent of the wages from about 30 days of male agricultural labour.

c) It was in Keshipur that most restrictions were faced concerning gleaning. Only one of the respondents reported gleaning, and this was a respondent whose household owned land on which paddy was grown. None of the other households gleaned because no farming household permitted access to their land. Typically, one respondent said indignantly: "No one lets us glean from their land, people glean from their own land. They never let us go

and glean." Another put it this way: "We are not allowed to glean. They won't let poor people glean." [7]

Each of the three villages had therefore developed different regulations concerning gleaning. In Fonogram it was permitted with some restriction, in Bithigram encouraged (particularly collection of grain from rat holes) or allowed without any restriction, and in Keshipur it was not permitted. I will comment on this pattern again at the end of this section.

A number of studies have shown that gleaning is a common practice among the poor in Bengal. Sengupta (1978: 7) has noted of landless labourer families in Birbhum District:

> Immediately after the harvest, the children of their families would rush to the fields and collect handfuls of grains that are left on the fields. Each landless family could collect 30 to 40 kgs. in the process. Santal (tribal) children are adept in collecting grains from rat holes where rats would store their day's collection.

Cain (1977: 219) mentions gleaning and the opening of rat holes as an activity carried out by children in a Bangladesh study village, and Howes (1985: 41) notes for his study village, also in Bangladesh, that: '....children from poor households, and the occasional widow, search for rat holes from which small quantities of grain may be retrieved.' The collection from rat holes mentioned here is probably not on the scale found in Bithigram. Siddiqui (1982: 358) also mentions children, old men and women gleaning, and collecting up to 1 kg. of grain a day each. Begum (1985: 235) has noted differences in gleaning, from a four village study in Bangladesh, between Comilla District, where gleaning was the source of nearly 20% of female labour earnings, and Modhupur District, where it made no contribution to female earnings; this regional difference can apparently be accounted for by differences in rice varieties grown. The class aspect of access to fields for gleaning purposes is also discussed in some detail by Scott (1985: 256-257) for his Malaysian study village.

I noted in Birbhum District during the 1987-88 field trip a pre-harvest collection of grain known locally as *jhora* . This involved the removal of unripened stands of unwanted paddy from a farmer's fields by poor people; this took place for example where there were poor quality stands that the farmer wanted to remove so that the seed stock for the following year would be kept pure. The poor person collecting the grain had to ask

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[7]This clear separation between the rich and poor ('them' and 'us') was encountered in all three villages (see section 7.7). Van Schendel (1981: 90) reports on a similar division from village Bangladesh.

the farmer's permission to do so, as the collector might damage the crop surrounding that to be collected.

A further point to be made concerns gleaning after HYV crops. As mentioned in chapter six, Fonogram respondents said that it was not possible to glean after the *boro* harvest. Respondents from Bithigram also said that HYV paddy grains only fell if there was hail or heavy rain. This finding is supported by Greeley (1987: 126). Greeley and Huq (1980: 14) comment that it is the longer straw of *aman* paddy that ensures lodging and therefore more fallen grain, as opposed to the shorter statured HYVs. Given the importance of gleaned grains to the poorest attempts to develop varieties of rice that drop less grain will, as Lipton has noted (1989: 255 fn39): 'Damage nutrition among the poorest gleaners.'

7.3.3 Fuel

More attention has been paid to the importance of the collection of fuel by poor rural households throughout South Asia than to gleaning (for a review of literature on India, see World Bank 1989; and various other studies discussed below). I asked respondents who gathered fuel, where it was gathered from, how much was sufficient to meet household need, if there was increasing difficulty getting fuel, and if collection was seasonal.

In the study villages, poorest households met nearly all of their dry season fuel requirements through CPRs. This was mainly in the form of fallen leaves and *gobar* (cow dung), but twigs, crop residues and any other burnable materials were also gathered. These materials were gathered from homesteads, fields, paths and ponds and wherever else they were available, for example in Fonogram from the graveyard that was allowed to overgrow and where everyone was permitted to collect dry wood and leaves, and from a nearby large garden owned by an absentee landlord. Gathering was done in either *juris* (bamboo baskets) or *bastas* (sacks, usually kept for storing rice). The size of these containers varied between households and across villages, so I asked about quantities collected in kgs.

a) In Fonogram 20 of the 22 respondents questioned on the subject gathered their main dry season fuel requirements. This gathering was done almost exclusively by women and children. Estimates varied as to the amount of time taken in collection, dependent on household make up. A common remark was that one person could gather enough leaves or *gobar* in a morning (about 3 hours) to last for two days. A *juri* of *gobar* (about 8-10 kgs.

wet or 3-4 kgs. dry) or a *basta* of leaves (about 5 kgs.) was considered sufficient to last for a day's cooking.[8]

The two respondents whose household members did not gather fuel were unable to do so in one case because both of the members (two widows) were out all day at work, and in the other because both of the parents worked and the children were too small to gather. These households spent 1-2 rupees a day on jute sticks or low grade coal.

All respondents noted that it was not possible to gather fuel during the rainy season, a seasonal dimension of rural poverty that does not seem to have been often noted (but see Jodha 1986: 1174, and Briscoe 1979). This is because leaves did not fall in this season, and cattle were kept in the homestead to protect both them and the paddy crop. It seemed likely that the new HYV paddy crop would mean less cattle being grazed during the *boro* season. Households stored *guti* (dried *gobar* made into cakes) gathered in the dry season, and also used jute sticks which were stored around the homestead or in the eaves of the roof of the house. Making of *guti* was women's work. Labourers cutting and retting jute often received jute sticks as part of their payment. Respondents did not mention restriction of access to fuel, as its collection was a traditional and unspoken 'right'.[9]

Respondents also noted that collection of fuel, particularly twigs and wood, was becoming progressively more difficult, which meant that households were occasionally having to buy small sacks of *guti* . As one woman put it:

> If we don't collect wood or leaves how will we cook. If there isn't any fuel we have to cut the amount we eat and buy a sack of *guti* that costs 10 or 12 rupees. We can't get any *gobar* as the cows aren't allowed out into the fields. There aren't any mango gardens in Fonogram, we have to cut wet wood and dry it. Wood is getting more and more scarce, and things will get worse."

A similar decline in the natural resource base has been noted throughout India (for an overview, see Agarwal 1989a and b). This causes particular problems for women and children, who are the main gatherers of fuel, but also increases stress on the household which has to divert money to fuel formerly gathered for free.

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[8]Rohner and Chaki-Sirkar (1988: 29-33), Warrier (1987: 26, 28) and Mayoux (1982: 168) report very similar findings from Purulia, Midnapore and Birbhum Districts of West Bengal. Howes and Jabbar (1986: 23) also mention that women and children spent 2-3 hours every day gathering fuel from a four location study in Mymensingh District, Bangladesh.

[9]By contrast, Dasgupta (1987: 109), from a study of a village on the Delhi-Haryana border, has noted that because of perceived shortages, collection of dung was restricted to the owners of the cattle.

In January 1989 in Fonogram some trees belonging to Daoud, the *samity* member from the village's wealthiest household, were cut down at night. The culprits were not discovered. It is difficult to interpret the meaning of this act as the perpetrators were not known, but it may have been a protest against Daoud's increasing wealth. If so, it may also have been an expression by poor people of their claim on trees, which produced fuel, as a resource that should be common to all.

b + c) Fonogram was set in a natural environment which contained plentiful local bio-mass, as opposed to the barren landscape surrounding the Midnapore villages. The lack of local natural resources in the latter villages was partly compensated for by the fact that the village economy in Bithigram and Keshipur depended to a greater extent on livestock, because of accessible forests, and the social forestry programme which supplied resources that were formerly found in local forests.[10]

In Bithigram *guti* and eucalyptus leaves were the main sources of fuel. These were gathered by all respondent households except for one, mainly by the women and children. Typically, gathering was done in the morning, after a breakfast of *panter bhat* [11] and before the mid-day meal. Estimates of the amount gathered and needed for use were the same as in Fonogram. Two respondents in Bithigram said that there was a lack of cow dung because of the number of people gathering it (which included all other village households). The seasonal problem found in Fonogram also existed in Bithigram.

The social forestry programme had had a significant impact on local resource use. In particular, collection of fuel had been made much easier, as the eucalyptus groves were within easy walking distance from the villages. However, access to these groves was not assured. The percentage of poorest households which had planted trees was lower than for the whole village (42% as against 54%). Eight of the 19 respondents had planted trees. As might be expected, it was two households that had not planted trees that reported restricted access to this resource. Those other villagers who had not planted but were able to gather leaves had to negotiate this use in an informal manner with their fellow villagers.[12]

Comments from wealthier Mahatos in Bithigram suggested that the Lodhas broke branches from eucalyptus owned by then, and on occasion stole trees. Who committed

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[10]For a discussion of livestock ownership, see section 7.5..

[11]Cooked rice soaked in water over night and eaten cold in the morning, a common breakfast for poor people.

[12]Nesmith (1990), in a study of three villages near to those discussed here, examines in detail how the access of the poor to eucalyptus groves was restricted.

such thefts was often not substantiated, but appeared to be bound up with the friction that existed between Lodhas and Mahatos, and also in keeping with the Lodhas having formerly been a criminal tribe.

In Keshipur the situation was similar to Bithigram. Again it was women and children wh gathered fuel. Respondents said that there was a shortage of fuel because all households gathered, and noted the seasonal problem, with eight of the 16 respondents reporting purchase of coal during the rainy season. The amount of coal needed by households depended on the size of the household, but on average households spent 1 rupee a day on it.

The findings presented here support the evidence from studies throughout South Asia as to the importance to poor people for fuel of the natural resource base (see Hossain (1987), Howes and Jabbar (1986) and Briscoe (1979) for Bangladesh; Dasgupta (1987: 106-7) for two villages in western India). Jodha's finding that poor households in 21 districts of seven states of dry western and southern India met 66-84% of their fuel requirements from CPRs is mirrored in the case study villages here.

Jeffery *et al* (1989) have broadened the discussion of 'dung-work' by locating it within relevant feminist theoretical debates, as well as connecting it to debates concerning the 'modernisation' of Indian agriculture. They make the point that because gathering of *gobar* and production of *guti* is women's work its value to the household is not recognized by either male villagers or development programmes and programmers. As they put it, in a statement that has particular relevance to rural development in Fonogram (1989: WS35):

> All the efforts of the government and industry in expanding credit, fertiliser, seed and water supply have undoubtedly commercialised important aspects of agriculture and increased the output of grain and cash crops, while equally important areas of economic activity in which women's roles are more significant have been ignored.

7.3.4 'Wild' foods and other common property resource uses

'Wild' foods means here those foods consumed but not cultivated by poorest households. These were generally gathered from the sides of paths, ponds, swamps, and the 'jungle' or over grown areas that were found in patches around the villages and accessible forests. I asked respondents questions about wild foods similar to those concerning fuel.

a) In Fonogram 20 out of the 22 respondents said that they gathered wild foods as a way of getting by in times of stress, and such foods were eaten regularly particularly during the

rainy season, when agricultural employment was limited, and the price of rice was highest. Gathering was done whenever and wherever possible, a point stressed by several respondents. It was difficult for respondents to give clear estimates of the amount gathered. Some of the foods, for example *kochu* (probably *Colocasia indica*) stalks, were eaten all year.[13]

During the four months of the rainy season (approximately June to September), when agricultural employment was limited, respondents said that one person could gather or catch daily one or part combinations of the following:
200 grams to 3 kgs. of various kinds of fish, e.g. *puti* (*Barbus sophora*), *pekal* (*Clarius batrachus*). The market price of these fish varied from 4-15 rupees a kg.;
200 grams of prawns (market price 30 rupees a kg.);
500 grams of jute leaves (not sold);
1-2 kgs. of *kochu* stalk (not sold);
5 kgs. of watercress (market price 2 rupees a kg.);
500 grams of *shojne* (a kind of horseradish, market price 8 rupees a kg.).

A number of authors (Crow 1984: 1756; Greenough 1982: 231; Currey 1981: 128; Rahaman 1981: 137) report the consumption of *kochu* by poor families in famine conditions in Bangladesh and Bengal. This plant was at the beginning of this century grown as a field crop (O' Malley 1914: 118 refers to it as *kochu* yam), but has since then been 'relegated' to a wild food.[14]

There were limits to the amount of certain kinds of wild leaves that could be eaten because of their detrimental effect on the digestive system if consumed too often. Fried *neem* (*margosa*) leaves were also eaten. Figs were eaten all year round, and were being sold in the market when previously they had only been consumed within the village. Respondents noted that all wild foods were becoming more scarce.

b) Within Bithigram it was poorest Lodha households that made most use of wild foods. Wild foods were also more important to them than to the poorest in the other villages, signifying a cultural difference and the traditional importance of 'minor' forest products to tribals. It took some persistence to gather information concerning these foods, as some respondents were reluctant to admit that they ate them (out of shame or embarassment

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[13]Sources for the plant and fish types below were the Samsad Bengali-English Dictionary (Calcutta: Calcutta Printing House 1980); Kelly (1985: 23); and Tindall (1983).
[14]It is ironic, given its importance in the poor person's diet, that the Bengali phrase *kochu khaowah* (or literally 'to eat *kochu* ') should mean metaphorically 'to eat or get nothing, or 'to be disappointed'. Similarly *shakh pata* , also consumed by the poor, which literally means 'edible leaves', has a figurative meaning of 'extremely poor food'.

(*lojja*), as one respondent put it). Figure 7.1 gives the average amount of individual items that could be gathered in a day by one adult, although some, such as the monitor lizard and the tubers, could only be caught or dug up occasionally. The Figure also gives the monthly price of bought rice.

Figure 7.1 Wild foods gathered by Bithigram poorest households

Month(1)	Type of food	Amount gathered (1 day)(2)	Market price (rupees a kg)	Market price of rice (rs.)
Boishakh	Mollusc	1 kg	?	3.50
Joistho	Monitor lizard	One lizard is 10 kg	12 (sold in village)	4.00-4.20
	Bairon leaf (3)	250	-	
	Sorrel	250	-	
	Mohua fruit(4)	?	?	
	Mohua flower	20	1	
Ashad	*Bairon* leaf	250	-	4.00-4.20
	Sorrel	250	-	
	Sweet potato	2 kgs	3 (sold in the village)	
	Prawns	500	10	
	Various fish	500-1kg	5-10	
Srabon	*Bairon* leaf	250	-	4.00-4.20
	Sorrel	250	-	
	Sweet potato	2 kgs	3 (sold in the village)	
	Crab	300	2	
	Prawns	500	10	
	Various fish	500-1kg	5-10	
Bhadro	*Khudro* (5)	200-500	8 (exchanged for rice)	4.50
	Sweet potato	2 kgs	3 (sold in the village)	
	Crab	2 kgs	8	
Ashin	Sweet potato	2 kgs	3 (sold in the village)	4.50
	Crab	2 kgs	2	
Kartik	*Churka aloo* (6)	2-3 kgs	-	3.50
	Sweet potato	2kgs	3 (sold in the village)	
Agrahan	*Churka aloo*	2-3 kgs	-	3.50
	Ikra rat	200 - 1kg		
Pous	*Churka aloo*	2-3 kgs	-	2.75
	Ikra rat	200 - 1kg		
Magh	*Shaluk* (7)	10 kgs	-	2.75
	Ikra rat	200 - 1kg		
	Pigeons	250	3	
Phalgun	*Shaluk*	10 kgs	-	2.75
Choitro	*Shaluk*	10 kgs	-	3.50

(1) The Bengali calendar runs from 15th April, i.e. Boishakh month lasts from 15th April to 14th May. The main part of the rainy season is in Ashad, Srabon and Bhadro (i.e. 15th June to 14th September).
(2) In grams unless otherwise specified
(3) Not identified. Eaten boiled.
(4) *Madhuka latifolia* or *Bassia latifolia.*
(5) A gourd, possibly *Coccinia cordifolia* .
(6) A kind of yam, possibly *Solesnostemon rotundifolius.*
(7) A kind of water lily.

Most of the foods were gathered in the pre-*aman* harvest period when seasonal factors combined to the disadvantage of the poorest, and the price of rice was highest. On one point all respondents agreed, that the wild foods available locally were continuing to decline as more land was put to agricultural use. The following comment was typical: "Ten years back all of the foods mentioned were found in the local forests all around but now it's difficult to get them. We have to go a long way to the forest now, going out in the morning and coming back at 4-5 in the evening."

Fish could be caught throughout the year, in ponds or the canal. Every household except for one reported fishing, and Figure 7.1 gives a representative amount caught each day. Usually half of what was caught was eaten by the household and half sold. In the summer crabs sat in pools of water and were easy to collect. Local Santhal women sold red ant eggs at 25 *paisa* for 3-4 grams which were used to catch fish. Fishing was done mainly by men. Molluscs were available in large quantities on the sides of ponds.

Mohua had in the past been in plentiful supply but was now difficult to find in any large quantity. As one respondent said: "Before we used to get a lot more from the jungle, but the *jotedars* cut it all down, so not so much is available." Liquor was produced from it. The fruit was also boiled and eaten with spices like meat. The flower was dried in the sun, broken on a *dheki* , mixed with *chira* (flattened rice) or fried rice and made into a round sweet.

Various tubers and potatoes (including some not mentioned in Figure 7.1 as they were not identified) were dug up from the local forests by children, women and men, but were also becoming increasingly scarce. Some of these tubers were estimated to be found 3-4 feet underground, so that it took a whole day to dig them out. Most respondents carried out this kind of collection. One respondent said that when rice was very scarce equivalent weights of *khudro* and rice were exchanged between farmers and Lodhas, which meant

that the Lodhas received "much less than the market price." Honey could also be found "if you looked hard enough for it."[15]

Hares, rabbits, tortoises and pigeons, cranes and other birds were also caught in the dry season. Hunting was done by men and children from most households. The monitor lizard, or *goshap* as it was known locally, the skin and meat of which was sold within Bithigram, was reported as common by O' Malley in the early 1900's (1914: 15).[16] O' Malley also noted a variety of wildlife in western Midnapore including deer and wild pig. He suggested (ibid.) that 'aboriginal tribes' were 'destroying indiscriminately' game, including partridges, quail, geese and ducks, a remark that reveals the colonial administrator's ignorance of the importance of such game to the subsistence of local tribals.

Despite their increasing scarcity, the knowledge of location and methods of preparation of wild foods still existed, and as one man put it: "People may deny that they go and gather these foods out of shame, but just you wait until they get hungry, they certainly know where they are and go and find them."[17]

c) In Keshipur much less use was made of wild foods by poorest households. The main wild foods eaten were various kinds of fish, which were caught mainly in the rainy season, along with crabs and prawns. *Noteh shakh* (a kind of spinach) was also gathered locally.

Keshipur respondents did make use of other CPRs. In 7 of the 16 respondent households women went to the local forests to gather *sal* (*Shorea robusta*) leaves for plate-making. These women said that they had to avoid the Forest Department guards to collect the leaves, but continued to go regularly to the forests. The main period when it was possible to collect the leaves was in the spring. The leaves were gathered, carried home, dried, and sewn together with small twigs from the *neem* (*Margosa*) tree. These plates were sold in the market by the women themselves (who had to walk the 10 kms. there and back) on Sundays. For about 3-4 days work up to 10 rupees could be earnt. The following comments from a female respondent were representative:

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[15] *Churka aloo* has been described as a totemic object for the Lodhas (Bhowmick 1963: 53).

[16] *Go* is the local colloquial term for cow, and *shap* means snake. The *goshap* apparently sucked the milk of cows, hence its name. This lizard is also hunted by the Hill Pandarams of South India (Morris 1982: 76) and by nomadic groups in Maharashtra (Malhotra and Gadgil 1988: 397).

[17] Davis (1983: 56) and Bhowmick (1963: 30-1) mention the importance of CPRs to the Lodhas. Bhowmick (1963: 41) also comments that access to farmers' fields by Lodhas for fishing was restricted; such restrictions were not found in Bithigram.

> I go to get *sal* leaves from 8 to 3. I can only get a few leaves - do you think there are any leaves left in the forest? Before I could go and gather leaves all day long. We used to make plates with many more leaves than we can now. I go during the week, when I can, and sell the leaves on Sunday. I make about 6-8 rupees a week doing this, women who are a bit younger make a bit more.

This access can be contrasted to comments by women from Lodha households in Bithigram, who said that they did not go to gather *sal* leaves as the Forest Department guards would beat them if they tried to do so.[18]

Not mentioned above but collected in all three villages was fruit which fell from trees (especially mangoes in the summer, plums, and tamarind); these were collected in particular by children.[19] In Fonogram children from poorest households also collected snails to feed to poultry. Date palm leaves were left on the side of ponds with most of the leaf submerged, and the snails crawling onto the leaves could be gathered easily. Snails were also found all over the paddy fields after the monsoon rains. Poorest households also grazed their livestock either on fallow fields, on the *aul* dividing fields, or in ditches and by the sides of ponds, for six months of the year. One Fonogram household member said that in the rainy season up to 30 kgs. of grass could be collected from *auls* . In the Midnapore villages where livestock were more important to the village economies, much of the *danga* or higher infertile land was used for grazing, some of it all year round.[20]

7.3.5 Common property resource use in the three study villages

It is possible to draw two conclusions from the data presented above. Firstly, that, despite the lack of local 'common land' as found in other parts of India, CPRs are vital to the subsistence of poorest households, and that CPR activities take up a substantial part of respondents', and particularly children and women's, time. Secondly, that CPRs are declining in both of the study regions. Other literature, quoted above, confirms that these patterns are common across Bengal and possibly India as whole (for an overview see Agarwal 1989a).

Lodha respondents in Bithigram estimated that they gained the equivalent of 400 rupees a month from all CPR activities; they included in this figure the cost of the labour involved,

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[18]Harassment and exploitation of tribals by forest guards has been noted throughout India (Agarwal 1989b: WS57; Morris 1982).

[19]Sengupta (1978: 9) describes 'landless families living on jackfruit or mango' in Malda and Coochbehar Districts of West Bengal.

[20]Much of the literature on gathering of wild foods deals with Africa, and concerns famine situations. For a list of famine foods, see Watts (1983:432-3), and for a more detailed discussion in Ethiopia, Rahmato (1988: 8-10). For a review of other literature on India and Africa which shows that such gathering is widespread, see Longhurst (1986).

not just the worth of the CPRs. In this sense, CPR activities provided more income per year than agricultural wage labour. A more conservative estimate for the 3 villages, excluding the labour involved, might be 50-100 rupees worth of rice gleaned a year, 1 rupee a day worth of fuel gathered, and 1-2 rupees of wild food gathered a day. This gives a figure of between 780 and 1195 rupees a year and would appear to accord with Jodha's more thorough survey from western and central India which concluded (1990: A66): 'CPR products collection is an important source of employment and income, especially during the period when other opportunities are non-existent. Furthermore, CPR income....accounts for 14 to 23 per cent of household income from all other sources in the study villages'. This figure can also be compared to the 286 rupees gained by income group 1 households from the new boro crop (Table 6.5).

It was women and children who were the main gatherers of CPRs in the study villages, and it was women who complained about the decline and reduced access to CPRs. In Bithigram and Keshipur where women worked as labourers, they still remained responsible for gathering fuel and cooking, which increased their burden still further. This increased burden should be seen in the context of male-oriented development programmes, such as that in Fonogram, that benefit the better off.

It is perhaps because it is mainly the work of women and important to the poor, that CPR use appears to have been largely ignored by policy makers. As Jodha has written (1990: A67): 'Despite their valuable contributions to the rural economy....CPRs are among the most neglected areas of development planning in the country. The formal invisibility or non-recognition of their contributions has led to disregard of CPRs by both welfare and production programmes.' Leakey (1986) makes a similar point, comparing the amount of attention that has been devoted to food crops as opposed to wild foods, a comment of particular relevance for Fonogram, and perhaps for West Bengal as whole where CPRs have not been a focus of research. Even at a conservative estimate, gathering of CPRs in Fonogram was likely to provide poorest households as much income as the yield from two *bighas* of sharecropped-in *boro* paddy land.

The discussion above shows that an analysis of CPR use based on availability or type may be simplistic. For example, in the two adjacent villages of Bithigram and Keshipur one group of the poorest were enthusiastic gleaners and the others were not permitted access to post-harvest fields, while the same two groups faced an opposite situation when it came to the collection of *sal* leaves. Respondents in each of the villages were angry that their access to these resources was restricted by the rich or the government, and declining in front of their eyes. Their anger was an expression of the poorest to their traditional 'right' to such

free produce, and part of the general conflict between rich and poor. Access to CPRs not only contributed substantially to household subsistence, but also meant less dependence on the rich for loans or other kinds of support. The combination of class and gender structures meant that it was poorest women who faced restrictions and anatagonism while trying to glean or collect *sal* leaves, and these petty restrictions were integral to their experience of poverty and lack of power.

7.4 Poorest people and food

The aim of my questions relating to food was to find out how poorest people coped with food shortages. I asked respondents what foods filled their stomach most when they were hungry; which types of food were eaten in times of stress; who decided on allocation of food and who went hungry if there were inadequate supplies; the amount of food needed by the household in a day, and the amount of shortfall.

It was not always easy to discuss food. Questions about the amount people ate and shortfalls of food were being asked to people who were regularly hungry. Some respondents made it clear what they thought about such questions, for example by using the interrogative form when replying, showing a mock contempt of the questioner, a common use in Bengali. In addition, estimates below of food consumption should be taken as such. As one man put it: "We don't measure how much food goes into our stomachs." Nevertheless, the following discussion attempts to shed some light on poorest people's attempt to cope with food shortages, and discusses the under-researched area of their attitudes towards food.

Poor people bought food mainly from the local shops, which charged about 10% extra for items bought on credit, and from the local markets. Food had to be bought every day, as the cash was not available to buy in larger amounts at cheaper prices. Little of respondents' food requirements came from ration shops. Ration rice, which was about 20 *paisa* cheaper than rice bought locally with cash, was taken by all except three Fonogram respondents when it was available, but the ration shop was open only once a week, the supplies erratic and the quality of the rice very bad. In Bithigram rice was available but only two households took it, and in Keshipur rice was not available. Ten Molisol respondents and 14 Bithigram respondents said they took ration sugar (at 100 grams per household member) on a regular basis. All other food had to be bought on the open market, although some wage payments were still made in grain in the Midnapore villages.

7.4.1 Food preparation and food types

During the discussions on what fills the stomach most when hunger comes, respondents in all three villages mentioned different types of food preparation that helped to stave off hunger. There was common agreement that it was only rice, the staple grain, that would "make the stomach happy". "The stomach won't understand unless it gets rice", as one respondent put it. When a sufficient quantity of rice was not available, three respondents in Fonogram and five in Bithigram said that they would take the water left over from boiling rice (*bhater phen*), which would fill the stomach and was usually fed to livestock.[21] Several respondents in Fonogram also said that they ate broken grains of rice known as *khud* .[22] When a 40 kg. sack of rice was shaken or sieved, about 1 kg of *khud* would fall out. This was sold only within the village and between women; one male respondent said contemptuously that it was sold by the wives of rich farmers to save up money to buy jewellery. *Khud* cost about half of the market price of rice; it could be boiled, and fried with oil and salt and alleviated hunger pangs. One Fonogram respondent also said that when hunger was severe they ate parts of the chaff left over after the threshing of paddy.

When asked what they would buy if they only had 2 rupees for the day's cooking (not an unusual occurrence according to respondents), 37 respondents out of 57 replying said rice. Among the rice varieties, 'fatter' ones were preferred as these "gave more energy".. However, a substantial minority (10 out of 22 respondents in Fonogram and 8 out of 19 in Bithigram) said that they would buy 500 grams of flour and make *gola routi* ; this was flour mixed with water and fried like an omelette, which was said to be more filling than *chapati*. . It was interesting to find *gola routi* eaten both by Muslims in Fonogram and Lodhas in Bithigram (no Keshipur respondents reported eating it), although I have found no other references to its consumption in the literature on village Bengal.

Fifty two of the 60 respondents also reported taking tea with salt in it as flavouring, as a means of staving off hunger. The reason for this was that for most of the poorest households sugar or *gur* were not available; salt was cheaper, as one Fonogram respondent said: "You can't ask your neighbours for sugar or *gur* , but they will let you have salt."

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[21] This tactic was also apparently used by a poor rural family in Korea during the Korean war (Yun Heung-gil 1989: 79). Greenough (1982: 226, 233) notes that beggars during the Bengal famine in 1943 went from house to house asking for *phen* , and connects this to the cultural significance of rice in Bengali culture, as *phen* contains little of nutritional value; it may also have been connected to the fact that *phen* appears to stave off hunger pains.

[22] *Khud* literally means a fragment or grain of rice. *Khudkura* , which literally means huskings and particles of rice, figuratively means very humble or bad food.

Respondents said that they resorted on a regular basis to appetite suppressants (for the widespread use of these in developing countries, see Leakey 1986: 40). In Fonogram respondents, both female and male, regularly took *pan* (betel leaf), which was also eaten by other villagers, as well as smoking *bidi* (cheroot). Bithigram and Fonogram respondents also bought *pan,* as well as cheaper forms of tobacco known as *khohoni* and *dokta* , which were all also taken by women and men. One man in Sagpara expressed the importance of such substances: "If we didn't take *pan* we would die of hunger."[23]

This resort to addictive substances as well as the regular consumption of poor quality foods which temporarily kept away hunger pains needs to be seen in the context of regular shortfalls of food, which are discussed next.

7.4.2 Consumption and its regulation

In reply to questions about the amount of food needed by the household, most respondents referred to the shortfalls of the particular day or week in which the interview was conducted. As the interviews took place during the post-harvest period, shortfalls were lower than at other leaner times of year (although the poor *aman* harvests in Fonogram meant more than usual hardship). Respondents were also asked to estimate their daily expenditure on food; any figures below are therefore estimates based on recall.

A representative daily shopping bill, from a Bithigram household with two adults and two children under six, is given below. This shows the amount the household members estimated they would need to suffice for one day, and fits closely with other estimates, when adjusted for household size.

Item	Amount	Price (rupees)
Rice	2kgs	6.50
Potatoes	1kg	1.40
Oil	50gms	1.20
Chillies	25gms	1.00
Lentils	100gms	1.00
Spices		1.50
Mustard oil		.50
Tea leaves		.40
Pan		1.00
Kohni		.20
Salt		.20
Vegetables		1.00
Total		15.90

[23] Male respondents also drank village liquor, from the date palm or other trees. It was a subject of some amusement when I asked about it in the villages, and no attempt was made to investigate the quantity taken or the amount spent on liquor.

If both parents worked the woman earnt 8 rupees a day and the man 10 rupees, so that they would have enough to meet their daily needs. However, employment was available for only half the year at most, so they and other respondents had to resort to cuts in consumption and supplementing their diet by wild foods. It was not a surprise to hear that this household, along with 56 of the other 59 households replying, spent more or less all their daily income on food on a regular basis. Only 3 households out of 60 said that they were getting an adequate amount of food. For the others, their estimated shortfall in grain ranged from 10 to 33%, with an average in Fonogram of some 25%.

These findings therefore fit in with a general nutritional pattern that has shown that poorest people spend 80% or more of their income on food but meet only 80% of their nutritional requirements (Lipton 1983a: 35). If poor people can give reliable estimates as to their dietary intake and shortfall, it is perhaps worthwhile consulting them about their needs more in nutritional surveys, rather than just carrying out anthropometric or food intake surveys as seems to be the norm.

In this situation of regular shortfall respondents had little choice but to regulate food consumption or to take loans to buy food, often from the local grocer shops. The latter they did circumspectly, as taking a food loan meant paying a higher price than if goods were purchased with cash, a psychological burden concerning repayment, and dependency on the shopkeeper. One tactic which regulated consumption was for household members to stay at home and fast while sleeping or lying down (noted also by Lipton 1983a: 32-3; and by Hartmann and Boyce 1983: 172 and Harari and Garcia-Bouza 1982: 35, for poor households in Bangladesh and India respectively). Respondents also decided to spread their hunger rather than meet immediate needs. As Fonogram respondents put it when describing how they got by after the 1986-87 floods: "We made one meal stretch into two." or: "We ate one day and fasted the next."[24] That this was a conscious decision was clear from the response to the question of what respondents would do if they had a little more money. Thirty nine (out of 43 who replied) said they would buy rice. Of these, 8 of the 19 respondents in Fonogram volunteered the information that they would buy rice, but this would not be eaten on the day it was bought but rather kept for a future date. Respondents were therefore willing to live with a degree of hunger in order to safeguard themselves against future problems, and this became more apparent when asking about strategies for

[24]Such regulation of consumption has been widely noted in South Asia. See Van Schendel 1989: 163; Jansen 1989: 3; Dreze 1988a: 79-80; Cecelski 1987: 46; Caldwell *et al* 1986: 688; Jodha 1978: A38-39; 1975: 1620, fn15. Dreze (1988a) notes that richer households may also use this strategy during periods of hardship.

retaining or buying assets (see section 7.6).[25] Such cuts in consumption were therefore attempts to stave off future hunger as well as future dependency on loans from shopkeepers or employers which would increase dependency.

Cuts in consumption did not fall equally on all members of the household. Intra-household distribution of food is a controversial subject (see Harriss 1990,1986; Agarwal 1989b 29-30; Agarwal1986; Wheeler and Abdullah 1988). Detailed results of replies from 58 respondents concerning the question of the order of household eating and who missed out if the food supply was inadequate are given in Appendix 7.1. It was clear that it was adult females, who were usually both mother and cook, who ate last (and by proxy, least) in every respondent household, and this tied in to many women's internalising of the norms of the patriachal system that operated in the villages. Access to food is only one indicator of deprivation, and this apparent complete acceptance of patriarchal norms in the matter of food allocation was in contrast to other areas of life where some women protested about their husband's actions. For example, responses concerning control of money from the 13 women interviewed on their own where the subject was relevant (that is, excluding 17 women who were widowed or no longer married), made it clear that wives did not accept their husbands' complete control over money; in 6 cases women complained that their husbands took the money they had earnt for their own use or said that they were unable to spend money without their husband's permission. There was also one case of regular violence by a man against his wife, particularly when the man had been drinking, which his wife complained bitterly about (and possibly other cases I was not told about).

Regulation of consumption may therefore be a strategy that harms some members of the household more than others.[26] Households as a whole, however, did get by making one meal stretch into two, by fasting and tolerating a degree of hunger, or by cooking foods they thought more filling, although their precarious situation left little room for manoeuvre as far as these strategies were concerned.

7.4.3 Food and self respect

In chapter two I discussed the connection between the origins of poverty measurement and the moral 'characteristics' of the poor, including the eating habits of the poor. It was because the poor did not know how and what to cook, it was argued in nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain and India, that they were poor and hungry. Lipton's work on

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[25]For similar findings from Howrah District in West Bengal, see Bharati and Basu (1988: 423).

[26]Wheeler andAbdullah (1988) have shown, however, that the perception of all villagers in a Bangladesh village that women need less food may not translate into actual discrimination.

nutrition (1983a) in particular followed this argument, replacing moral characteristics of the poor by physical ones. Little attention, however, appears to have been paid to poor people's views on food.

Chambers (1988: 16) has suggested that self respect has become increasingly important for poor people in India. The quote from Dasgupta in chapter four as to the relative importance of food and honour for tribals during the 1886 famine in Midnapore would suggest that self respect has been important to the poor for some time. I asked respondents about the relative importance to them of food and self respect.[27] As food has been a consistent preoccupation of investigators and measurers of poverty, it seemed worthwhile to try and compare the importance to the poor of these two areas.

Across the three villages, of the 58 respndents replying, 49 said that they valued self respect more than food. As one Fonogram respondent succinctly and typically replied: "If I don't have self respect, will food go into the stomach?" Bithigram and Keshipur respondents said much the same; for example one man in Bithigram replied: "Even if there isn't any food in the house, if I can speak with other people in the village it is better as then I have self respect." Of the other 9 respondents, 6 said that they needed food more, and 3 that they needed both equally. Of the latter, one Fonogram woman said: "If I don't have food what use is self respect. But if I have food and people insult me, that is no good either. I need both."

The wider implications of these replies will be discussed in section 7.7. Limiting the discussion here to the relation between food and self respect, the preference of most of the poorest respondents suggests that the concentration on nutritional minima by poverty measurers misses poor people's experience of poverty, which meant that, despite their regular hunger, most poorest people in the study villages felt it was more important to be treated with respect than gratify immediate needs.

Many studies have been carried out by the well fed on the hungry. What do the hungry think of the eating habits of the well fed? In the interviews such views did occasionally come up. Here are two examples. When being asked about which foods filled the stomach most, Hamedchha, my assistant from Fonogram said that he thought those doing manual labour needed to eat a fatter grain than *babus* (gentlemen) who sit in offices all day (wearing wristwatches and trousers) and prefer thinner varieties of rice. A similarly ironic comment was made when asking Murjina, a widow from Fonogram, how she managed to

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[27]The actual phrasing of the question was 'Which do you value more, food or self respect?' (*Aponi konta moolaban mone koren, khabar na saman?*).

stay so healthy when regularly missing out on meals. We had been discussing poverty and wealth at some length. Murjina began talking, mimicking the rich and poor people she described:

> When rich people sit down to eat, they have a big plate in front of them and five or six smaller dishes around it with different types of food in them, full of meat, fish and vegetables. They take a little bit from one dish and say "Oh, that's too spicy", then a little bit from another dish and say "Oh, that's too sweet." Complaining like this, they don't end up eating very much. But when a poor person sits down to eat, they just eat whatever is put in front of them as quickly as they can, even if it a whole plate of jungle greens, and get by in that way.

Murjina was a good mimic of the dainty eating habits of the rich, and this type of mimicry was one example of a poor person's 'everyday resistance' to their deprivation. Although both her and Hamed's comments refer to an impersonal caricature of the rich (in contrast to other comments reported in section 7.7), they show that it is not only the well-fed who have views about how and what the hungry eat.

7.5 Livestock and sharerearing of livestock

7.5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this section is to analyse a system of rearing of livestock used by the poorest in Fonogram. The widespread nature of this system and its importance to the poor does not appear to have been previously recognised. Before discussing it I introduce the section with a discussion of livestock use and ownership in the three study villages.

Second to land, livestock was the most important source of intra-village income in all three study villages. Livestock were grazed on fallow land, or fed with gathered grass or other CPRs, and hence for the poor rearing of livestock could be mainly free. Livestock were looked after by children and women, and it was a common sight to see children driving out cows or goats to the fields in the morning as they went to gather fuel, and bringing the animals back at sunset. Animals were frequently the subject of dispute, with cows and goats eating standing crops and ducks and chickens wandering into courtyards and eating grain or disturbing women trying to cook.

Table 7.1 gives the number of adult plough animals, milk cows and goats owned in the villages.[28]

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[28]Bithigram and Keshipur villagers owned buffaloes and sheep, but these have not been included in the Table as they were not kept in Fonogram. The value of animals owned

Table 7.1 Number of livestock owned in the case study villages, 1988-89(1)

Village	Type of animal		
	Milk cows	Plough animals	Goats
Fonogram	45 (0.3)	76 (0.5)	70 (0.5)
Bithigram	130 (1.3)	115 (1.2)	50 (0.5)
Keshipur	99 (1.7)	69 (1.2)	50 (0.9)

(1) Figures in brackets give the number of livestock per village household.

The Table shows the greater importance of cattle in the Midnapore villages, reflecting the need to diversify sources of income because of the less fertile nature of land operated, as well as the large amount of *danga* grazing land available locally. Table 7.2 shows distribution of livestock across the four income groups for the three villages, compared to land operated.

Table 7.2 Ownership of livestock and operation of land by income group in the three study villages, 1988-89 (percentages)(1)

Village	Income group				
	1	2	3	4	Total
Fonogram					
Milk cow	13	31	27	29	100
Plough animals	11	20	45	24	100
Goat	28	44	17	11	100
Land operated	7	15	33	45	100
Bithigram					
Milk cow	2	19	18	61	100
Plough animals	3	34	23	40	100
Goat	10	48	10	32	100
Land operated	8	26	22	44	100
Keshipur					
Milk cow	-	21	5	74	100
Plough animals	3	19	19	59	100
Goat	6	28	16	50	100
Land operated	11	25	19	45	100

(1) Sharereared animals are counted as owned by rearer-in (see below).

Table 7.2 shows that, as with land, it is the higher income groups that control livestock, although livestock is more equally distributed among income groups in Fonogram than operated land, and a higher percentage of goats in Fonogram and Bithigram are owned by

differed depending on age and quality, but most plough cows were valued in the range of 750-1000 rupees, milk cows in the range of 300-600 rupees, and goats in the range of 100-150 rupees. The price estimated by respondents did not vary greatly between the villages.

the two lower income groups. Also, higher percentages of livestock as compared to land operated were found in income group 1 in Fonogram.

7.5.2 Sharerearing of livestock

While enquiring about ownership and sale of livestock, poorest respondents in Fonogram told me about a system known locally as *poussani* (meaning to rear), which involved the sharerearing or 'agistment' of animals.[29] Cows, goats, ducks or chickens could be taken on loan in this fashion. The most common arrangement was similar to some sharecropping arrangements. The sharerearing-in household would rear the animal, taking responsibility for feeding it. In the case of a female, after the animal had given birth twice the rearing-in household kept the second born and returned the mother and first born. In the case of a male animal the proceeds after sale would be divided equally between rearer and owner. In the case of fowl, eggs were shared equally between the two parties.

Subsequently, I asked each household in Fonogram about sharerearing. In Fonogram in 1988-89, 26 households (some 18% of village households, a similar figure to those hiring in land) were involved in hiring in livestock. In all there was a total of 34 cases of rearing-in of animals (with 6 households rearing-in more than one animal from different parties). The income group distribution of sharerearing is shown in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3 Income group distribution of instances of sharerearing, Fonogram 1988-89

Income group		Giver of animal 1	2	3	4	Total
Recipient	1	4	2	3	5	14
	2	1	-	-	3	4
	3	1	-	-	-	1
	4	2	-	-	1	3
	Total	8	2	3	9	22

Apart from these 22 cases, there were another 12 cases of rearing-in. Eight of these involved receipt of animals from absentee landlords or others outside the village, and the other 4 involved rearing-in of animals from a close relative outside the village. Eight of the households rearing-in from outside the village were from income group 1, and 3 from

[29]The Oxford English Dictionary gives agistment as: 'To take in livestock to remain and feed, at a certain rate.' First usage of this kind was in Britain in 1691, which suggests that agistment has a long history.

income group 2. Of the exchanges within the village, it is clear from Table 7.3 that sharerearing mainly transferred resources from the richer to the poorer households. It was also used as a means of supporting poorer relatives, and 7 of all the transactions involved close relatives. There were also 4 transactions within income group 1, where poorer households were either unable to raise the livestock themselves or gave livestock to other poorer households to help them out. Otherwise, the main source of livestock was group 4 households.

The animals reared were 10 cows, 31 goats and 11 chickens. Income group 1 households reared-in a large proportion of these - for example, 5 milk cows, 18 goats and 1 plough animal, which amounted to some 38% and 64% respectively of the total owned by the group in the former two categories.

Discussion with respondents made it clear that it was women who organised *poussani*, and it was their role, along with children, to rear the animals. For example, the four cases of rearing-in of animals from relatives outside of the village involved women who had married outside. For the richer women, rearing-out animals was a way to help their relatives or pass on the responsibility of raising animals. For the poorer, the system meant a chance to gain a vital asset. This system can therefore be seen to parallel the system of sharecropping, organized by men. Like sharecropping, it was a system negotiated by two unequal partners where both gained, but without the need for the large inputs involved in farming. For the poorest it was a vital and informal method of securing their livelihood.

In the Midnapore villages *poussani* rarely took place, and as will be seen, this makes them somewhat unusual. The *panchayat* chairman told me that such arrangements had taken place up until about the early 1980's, but now no-one wanted to give out animals as they were in shorter supply than previously, although a few people still gave goats.[30] In Bithigram and Keshipur cattle were looked after on a different basis, known as *chorano*, which involved their grazing by a cow boy who took the livestock out for the day and returned them to their owners at night. Each cow boy took about 20 animals, and was paid for the number of animals tended, usually either 30 kgs. of paddy per cow a year, or 7 rupees a cow per month. The absence of the *poussani* system possibly accounts for the lower percentage of livestock owned by income group 1 households in Bithigram and Keshipur (Table 7.2), even taking into account the smaller size of this income group in the Midnapore villages.

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[30]Evidence of Lodha households engaged in sharerearing in 1952 can be found in Bhowmick (1963: 40). This took place near Jhargram, which is close to the study area described here. One household in Keshipur was in 1988-89 rearing-in two goats from someone outside the village.

The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), a large rural development programme which was intended, inter alia, to provide loans to poor families for the purchase of milk cows, did operate in the Midnapore villages. Evaluations of the IRDP have come to different conclusions about its success (see Seabright 1988; Kurian 1987; Rath 1985; and for a review of relevant literature, Dreze 1988b). However, it seems likely that a substantial proportion of assets intended for the poor under IRDP have benefitted the non-poor. As the IRDP scheme did not operate in Fonogram it was not possible to evaluate the effect of the programme on the *poussani* system. IRDP loans were taken in the Midnapore villages, but as the very small number of milk cows in income group 1 in those two villages show, villagers with the least income (who were the target group of the IRDP) had not received major benefits. Six households in Bithigram had received IRDP loans for buying livestock, of which 2 were from income group 1, 2 from group 2 and one each from groups 3 and 4. One of the households from group 1 had sold their IRDP cow after two years at a loss of 50 rupees. In Keshipur a further 6 households had received loans, of which 2 were in income group 1, and 4 in group 2. Even given the smaller numercial size of income group 1 in the Midnapore villages, the IRDP performance did not match the ability of the *poussani* system to transfer assets to the poor in Fonogram.[31] IRDP has been a 'top-down' programme, and when formulating it planners were presumably unaware of the existence of a widespread indigenous system in India of livestock re-distribution within villages (see below). It is possible to hypothesize that IRDP has damaged that indigenous system by introducing an external intervention that has increased the commoditization of livestock and milk production. The ethics of the indigenous (unequal) system cannot be addressed within the scope of this thesis, although the question of the operation of a 'moral economy', into which *poussani* fits, will be discussed further in section 7.7.

7.5.3 Sharerearing by poorest Fonogram households

When interviewing the Fonogram poorest households, I asked in more detail about sharerearing arrangements. Of the 22 poorest respondents asked about sharerearing, 20 had livestock, the other two having insufficient space to keep animals. Of these 20, 7 had sharereared-in livestock in 1986-87, and 5 others had sharereared-in in the previous 2-3 years. Two other households wanted to sharerear but could not because of unavailability of animals.

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[31]Unlike in Fonogram, Midnapore villagers kept sheep. Income group 1 households in Bithigram owned no sheep, but group 1 households in Keshipur owned between them 6 sheep which partly made up for lack of other livestock.

Sharerearing arrangements could be quite complex. For example, one elderly widow, Nurjahan, (from household 2) had sharereared-out a milk cow to the female household head of one of the richest households in the village (Rupajan, from household 129), as she was unable to look after it herself. At the same time, Nurjahan's daughter-in-law, who lived in the adjacent house, had taken a goat from Rupajan's sister-in-law.[32] There was a long-standing connection in terms of livestock between these two sets of households; Nurjahan had a few years before sold a cow reared-in from a further household to Rupajan to pay for medical expenses.

For another poorest widow, sharerearing was an important source of income. She sharereared-out a milk cow to another poorest person (a widow from household 8), and a goat to an income group 4 household. At the same time she sharereared-in a goat from the poorest person in the village (another elderly lady who was ill) and a chicken from one of the richest households (household 139). These examples show the complex web of relations that governed this enterprise.

Livestock could be crucial assets for the poorest (see section 7.6). What were poorest people's views of the system of sharerearing? Another poorest widow, Sundari, a maid-servant who lived with her relative Raila who followed the same occupation, described their experiences of share-rearing as follows:

> I've taken a *poussani* bullock from Lokibabu (her employer), when it is bigger we will get half and Loki will get half. We've also taken some hens from Raila's daughter who is married outside the village - they will have to be returned. If the hens lay eggs no-one will touch them even though we are both out all day, because we are poor people. We used to have a cow that died from dehydration - I used to cry all the time about that, then Loki's mother told me to take the cow we've got now. I also used to have a *poussani* goat from the shop-keeper, but that died as well.

This quote makes obvious both the importance of livestock to the poorest, and that sharerearing is arranged by women.

Another poorest respondent (a man, employed as a petty trader), whose household sold one sharereared goat after the 1986-87 flood in Fonogram to raise money for food, talked generally about livestock and sharerearing:

> We have taken *poussani* goats in the past from B. (an absentee landlord) but they died. If the goats or cows go into anyone else's property it causes a lot of problems. Five to seven years back there was more *poussani* , but

[32]This paralleled the sharecropping system where some households both hired-in and hired-out land.

> people don't give animals now because of spite and jealousy (*hingsha*). Rich people won't even sharecrop out their land, they would rather let it lay fallow than give it out to the poor.

This picture of increasing scarcity of available livestock was echoed by other respondents, as was the animosity towards the rich (see section 7.7). One man put the increasing scarcity down to the increase in the price of milk which made people reluctant to rear-out cows. Other respondents said that the rich, who had more livestock, were not giving out animals, and therefore the poor had to do so. As one woman put it: "Rich people don't give animals for sharerearing - if poor people have to give, do you think rich people are giving?" It was explicit here, and in the quote above, that it was the right of the poor to be able to sharerear livestock in this manner. The failure of the rich to provide animals was therefore part of the overall conflict within the village between rich and poor.

7.5.4 The literature on share-rearing

Poussani is of importance to the poor and poorest in Fonogram, and a means by which resources are transferred mainly from richer to poorer (but also between poorer) households. The system benefits the rich, but not at the expense of the poor. A large number of studies from throughout India have noted the existence of *poussani*, and I deal with them at some length as its importance has not been recognised. I will first discuss historical evidence from Bengal, and then consider findings of studies from West Bengal and Bangladesh, and from other parts of Asia, and Africa. Because of the large number of relevant studies, the discussion is confined to noting the widespread nature of the system, and who it involves in terms of class and gender. The nature of the system in terms of division of animals in the studies is as described above unless otherwise mentioned.

Cooper (1984: 80), referring generally to Bengal in the 1930's and 1940's, discusses sharerearing as a form of exploitation:

> Animals required (by share-croppers) for cultivation were loaned in various ways. A landlord could supply the cattle and the sharecropper bear the costs of maintenance, while the cattle continued to belong to the landlord. Alternatively the sharecropper looked after a cow for a landlord and the first calf that was born would belong to the sharecropper, but subsequent calves belonged to the landlord. In these ways the landlord ensured that the sharecropper was provided with the means of production without actually bearing the costs of raising the livestock, even increasing his own stock.

Historically, therefore, sharerearing was carried out between landlords and sharecroppers, and fitted into an exploitative system of sharecropping that dated back at least to the nineteenth century (ibid. : 26).[33]

More recent evidence from West Bengal shows that the nature of the system has changed. Danda and Danda (1971: 42-46), writing about fieldwork carried out in a village in Burdwan District in 1967-68, refer to landowners 'sometimes' developing a *paalaa* (also meaning to sharerear) relationship involving cows, goats and hens, with male daily and annual wage labourers, farm servants, and female paddy huskers and domestic servants. P.K. Bose in two studies (1984; 1985), the first in 3 villages in Birbhum District and 1 in Purulia District, and the second in 10 villages in Purulia, Midnapore and Birbhum Districts, describes sharerearing arrangements, mainly for sheep and goats, in all villages studied. In the second of these studies Bose comments that: (1985: 79): "In the.... system prevalent in the [10] villages an owner of livestock loans one or two of them, to another - mostly to poor peasants - who looks after them and in return gets half of the progenies.' Sharerearing is mentioned in passing by A. Dasgupta (1981: 72) in a study of a Jalpaiguri District village where the: '....animal *adhi* (sharing) system between a *jotedar* (landowner) and *adhiar* (sharecropper) (is no longer followed), but the arrangement is still followed by kinsmen and neighbours.' Rohner and Chaki-Sirkar (1988: 28) also comment, from a study of a Birbhum District village, that young untouchable boys reared-in cows and goats, although (ibid.): 'Few boys are lucky enough.... to have such "adopted" animals.'[34]

Further evidence is available in studies from Bangladesh. Van Schendel (1981: 112) for a village in Rangpur District mentions the great importance of the system to rearing-in households, and also discusses the risk involved for the rearer-in if the animal died, as the owner would claim compensation. Siddiqui (1981: 35) found 20 poor households (out of a total of 156) in a Jessore district village rearing-in calves or kids. Jansen (1986: 44) from a village in Dhaka district noted that 9 out of 62 village households reared-in livestock, with the transfer being from rich to poor. White (1988: 298-301, 394) discusses *poussani* in more detail from a study village in Tangail District, where sharerearing-out of goats, but not cattle, by women from richer households was common, placing it in the context of the overall village social and patriarchal structures. White notes that (ibid.: 300-1): 'Socially, share-tending contracts express the good relationship between the two parties ....married women commonly share-tend out in their natal village to retain some independence of their

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[33]Sunil Sengupta has told me that *poussani* operated in Bengal for several generations before the 1940's.

[34]I also came across sharerearing from landowners to the poor in Sahajapur village in Birbhum District.

husband's household.[35]

Sharerearing, like sharecropping, therefore goes under different names, and there are also slight variants in the system. It is clear that the system is common throughout West Bengal and Bangladesh; and it also occurs across the different agro-ecological regions, and Muslim, tribal and Hindu villages represented in the studies quoted. The available evidence suggests that the system has developed from one between sharecropper and landlord to one between rich and poor households, and that women rather than men are particularly involved in these transactions.

Outside Bengal, Breman (1974) gives an interesting perspective on *poussani* from his field work in Gujarat. In 1962-63 he noted in one study village that *Dublas* (or lower castes) took in cattle from *Anavils* (upper castes). He describes this (ibid.: 192) as: '....an excellent means of bonding the farm servant who no longer lives on his master's land.' He also noted (ibid.: 193): 'Of the eight Dublas who have managed to pay off their debts, six did so by rearing cattle for their masters.' Returning to the same area between 1977 and 1982, Breman remarked (1985a: 270-1): 'The farmers are no longer interested in what is literally called 'sharecropping of cattle'. .... Now that milk production is commercialized the farmers are interested in improving the quality, to the cost of agricultural labourers, who are not in a position to provide appropriate feeding and stalling.' This loss of a source of income for the poorer lower castes is placed by Breman in the context of the decline of the extra-economic links between employers and labourers. This situation is somewhat different, therefore, to that in Bengal where *poussani* still exists in a different form to its original one, although it is interesting to note that the commercialization of milk was the reason given by one Fonogram household for the increasing unavailability of livestock to rear in the village.

Appendix 7.2 gives further details of 12 cases of share-rearing, 5 from India, 3 from other parts of Asia, and 4 from Africa, outlining who rears-in and out, and the type of animal involved. The Appendix and the discussion above show that the *poussani* system is replicated in a wide range of rural societies where livestock are important to the poor. While few studies specify who has made the *poussani* arrangement (in the studies noted in Appendix 7.2 only Epstein *et al* and Cashdan specify this, referring to a woman making the arrangement in the former and men in the latter), the Bengal evidence suggests that it is

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[35]Evidence of similar sharerearing arrangements in Bangladesh can be found in Cutler *et al* (1989: 54); Katona-Apte (1988: 45); Howes and Jabbar (1986: 24-5) (where dung rather than animals was kept by the rearer-in); Chen (1983: 148, 163); Hartmann and Boyce (1983: 163); and Abdullah and Zeidenstein (1982). The last three of these studies and that by Katona-Apte note that it is women who arrange sharerearing.

mainly women who are involved in *poussani* transactions. One of the common features of the system is that it is poor households who receive livestock from the better off. It is perhaps because it mainly involves women and the poor that the widespread nature of this system has not been recognised. One peculiar feature of the literature on *poussani* is that none of the 30 studies quoted above refer to any of the others that have mentioned the subject!

In Fonogram, and probably elsewhere, this indigenous form of resource management is one negotiated within the village informal economy and through village socio-economic structure, and provides a possible structure on which external intervention might build. A cautionary note is that Van Schendel (1981: 112) and Swift (1981: 86) both comment that if the sharereared animal dies this can have serious consequences for the household rearing-in.

7.6 Poorest people and assets

7.6.1 Introduction

Physical assets that can be sold or mortgaged, such as land, livestock or trees, can be crucial to poor people's survival in times of stress. Their importance has been mentioned in a number of studies (quoted in Chambers 1983: 114-131). However, Chambers and Leach have noted (1989: 330): '....scholars and practical analysts (have not) often treated contingencies and asset disposal as central concerns.' There has been a limited amount of field work carried out concerning sale of village land in South Asia (see BRAC 1984: 7-10; Siddiqui 1982: 141; and in particular Cain 1981). Chambers and Leach (1989) themselves discuss the importance of the sale of trees in meeting contingencies. Among the reasons the authors give for this general gap in knowledge is the neglect of professionals of: '....things that matter to the poor.' (ibid.: 331). This section aims to add to the knowledge on this subject.

It became clear during the interviews that assets, debt, illness, and power were closely interlinked within 'integrated rural poverty'. But the importance of illness was not fully recognized until after the interviews with poorest households had been completed in Fonogram, so information from that village on the relation between illness and sale of assets is partly lacking.[36] Below I describe the assets people owned, sales, and poorest people's views about assets. It was clear that while asset maintenance might be women's work, asset management and sale fell within the male province.

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[36]An extra question on illness (see Appendix 5.1) was included for the Midnapore villages.

7.6.2 Assets owned by the poorest

B. Harriss (1987: 11) has commented after a review of micro-level literature on poverty in India that:

> The domestic asset position of the poor describes the consequences of inability to accumulate in almost identical terms in a large number of micro studies. The poor have one or two sets of clothing "in which they stand and sleep", a few mats, a mud stove and mud cooking pots, grinding stones, a few simple lamps, elementary agricultural tools.

The evidence from the case study villages supports this finding concerning domestic assets. Very few household members had more than two sets of clothing; one woman in Fonogram told me that she only had one *sari* , which she had worn for the last year, and confided that she rarely washed the *sari* as in that way the cloth lasted longer.

Poorest households in Fonogram did own (in 1986-87) a number of other productive assets, and the quantity of these had not been substantially affected by the flooding in 1986. Between them, the 25 Fonogram poorest households owned: 171 decimals of farm land (not including homestead land - which 5 households did not own), 1 plough animal, 6 milk cows, and 9 goats (mostly sharereared-in), a number of chickens and hens, 25 fruit trees (mainly mango, plum, tamarind and *bel*), as well as banana trees. None of the households had any jewellery, although one had a nose-pin in mortgage.

Bithigram's 19 poorest households in 1988-89 owned more assets, mainly because of the government programmes in the village. Between them they owned a little under 2 hectares of *dhan* land, and about 4 hectares of *dahi* land, all of which had been received under the government *patta* programme. On the *dahi* land between them they had planted 8,650 eucalyptus trees. They owned very few other trees and no jewellery. They also owned 5 plough animals, 6 goats, and four sheep (none of which had been received under IRDP). Apart from their agricultural tools, Bithigram households had almost nothing else - no cots and usually only one or two thin blankets.

Keshipur's 16 interviewed poorest households owned 6 hectares of *dahi* land and only 5 decimals of *dhan* land, about half of the *dahi* land being *patta.* On the *dahi* land they had planted 5,900 euclayptus trees. They also owned 5 plough animals (one of which had been bought with an IRDP loan), 1 milk cow, 4 goats and 11 sheep.

Comparatively, Fonogram poorest households owned 7 decimals of land each, Bithigram households about 30 decimals of *dhan* land and 60 decimals of *dahi* land, and

Keshipur households about 100 decimals of *dahi* land. The *patta* land received by Bithigram and Keshipur households had all been received in the few years prior to the survey, and could not be sold under government regulations, although respondents said that it could be mortgaged. The limited quantity of assets owned by poorest households meant that their ability to manage these assets resourcefully was severely restricted.

7.6.3 Management and sales of assets by the poorest

Respondents were asked if their household had sold any land in the last five years, or any other assets in the last two years, the reason for the sale, who bought the asset and the price. Such knowledge of how poorest people manage assets might assist in programmes to help the poorest stop selling productive assets.[37]

There were a large number of sales in all three villages under varying circumstances. Tabular mode has been chosen as the most concise form in which to represent the data, although detail is sacrificed for concision using this method. Chambers (1983: 114-118) has suggested a five-fold typology for documenting the purpose of asset sales, which includes social conventions (such as marriage or funerals), disasters, physical incapacity, unproductive expenditure, and exploitation. This typology, with two additions, productive expenditure and miscellaneous or unknown, was found to be a useful one as most of the reasons for sales could be subsumed within it, and is used in the Tables below. Information in the Tables is based on recall, and where respondents were uncertain about dates or prices this has been indicated with a question mark.

[37]Land sales by income group for Fonogram has been discussed in some detail for the 1986-87 to 1988-89 period in the previous chapter, where it was seen (Tables 6.6 and 6.7) that during that period income group 1 households (into which category all except one of the poorest Fonogram respondents fall) sold only 33 decimals of land.

Table 7.4 Sale of assets by Fonogram poorest households (land 1982-1987, other assets 1985-1987)

Income group no.	Asset	Buyer (income group no.)	Price(1)	Date of sale	Reason for sale
A Social convention					
8	2 jack-fruit trees	?	? (good)	1986	Marriage of daughter
20	10 decs land	Absentee landlord	800rs	?1985	Marriage of daughter
24	2 cows 2 goats	Market	?(good)	?1986	Marriage of daughter
32	1 bigha land	Distant relative	?	1984	Marriage of son
B Disaster					
21	Cow	Nephew (group 3)	150rs (good)	1986	Post-flood expense
29	Cow	Market	?	1986	Post-flood
	Goat	Market	150rs	1986	expense
C Physical incapacity					
4	Van	Outsider	700(poor)	1986	Sickness
D Unproductive expenditure					
3	10 decs land	Brother (group 4)	2000Rs	1985	Repayment of debt
20	3 trees	?	?(good)	1986	House repair
F Productive expenditure					
57	1 cow	Outsider	1200rs	1986	Purchase of land
G Miscellaneous					
47	2 goat kids	Outside villager	? (poor)	1986	?

(1) 'Good' or 'poor' indicates respondents' views as to whether or not they received adequate money for the asset.

Table 7.5 Sale of assets by Bithigram poorest households (land sales 1984-89, other assets 1987-89)

Income group no.	Asset	Buyer	Price	Date of sale	Reason for sale
A. Social convention					
5	Bullock	Market	1500rs	?1987	Marriage of daughter
C. Physical incapacity					
5	400 roof tiles	Outside villager	500rs	1988	Sickness
13	7 sheep	Market	700rs	1987	Sickness
15	2 goats	Market	180rs	1988	Sickness
17	Bullock	Market	400rs	1989	Sickness
17	1 goat	Market	120rs	1989	Sickness
30	2 goats	Market	200rs	?1988	Sickness
36	1 goat	Market	120rs	1989	Sickness
37	Bullock	Market	400rs	?1987	Sickness
43	Hens	Market	250rs	1988	Sickness
	Sheep	Market	500rs	1988	of h.hold
	2 Bullocks	Market	1400rs	1988	member
D. Unproductive expenditure					
37	2 sheep	Market	150rs	1988	Repayment of loan
E. Exploitation					
5	600 roof tiles	?	550rs	?1987	Court costs

Table 7.6 Sale of assets by Keshipur poorest households (land sales 1984-89; other assets 1987-89)

Income group no.	Asset	Buyer	Price	Date of sale	Reason for sale
A. Social convention					
10	4 *bighas* land	Outside villager	8000rs	?1984	Marriage of daughter
13	Cows/ goats	Market	?	?1987	Marriage of son
C. Physical incapacity					
4	Bullock	Market	700rs	1988	Sickness
7	2 bullocks	Market	1700r	1988	Sickness/ death
13	1 *chola* tree	?	150rs	1988	Sickness
F. Productive expenditure					
11	2 sheep	?	250rs	?1988	Household expense

In terms of sales of particular assets, the Tables show the importance of livestock to the poorest. Out of the total of 31 cases of individual sales, 22 involved livestock (making up some 50% of monetary value where this could be identified). In Bithigram all except two were livestock sales. Land was sold in 4 cases, for the marriage of a daughter or son in three, and for the repayment of a large debt in one, suggesting that large sums were necessary for these contigencies. Only 3 sales of trees were reported, which may reflect the ease with which it is possible to sell livestock as opposed to trees, and the very few homestead trees owned by Bithigram respondents. This latter finding suggests that Chambers and Leach's (1989) hypothesis as to the relative importance of trees as savings banks may need further empirical investigation.

In 22 out of the 26 cases where the purchaser of the asset could be identified, the sale was either in the market or outside the village. There were periodic markets relatively near to the three villages, and villagers were obviously getting a better price for their assets outside of the village. Respondents were not generally unhappy about the prices they received for their assets,[38] although there were clear examples of exploitation, for example the case of the sale of the van in Fonogram by a household with a very sick male adult. This sale of assets outside of the villages was in contrast to sales of land which took place mainly to other villagers (see chapter six).

[38]I asked about this only in Fonogram.

The reason for sale differed across villages. In Bithigram the reason given was sickness in 11 out of 14 cases, and if other cases of sale of assets before 1987 are taken into account, almost every one of the 19 Bithigram respondent households had sold assets because of major illness in the household.[39] Seven households also sold assets to marry off a child.[40]

Only one of the sales has been listed under 'exploitation'. However, asset sales should be seen within the context of 'integrated rural poverty'. For example, many of the households selling assets were in addition taking loans, sometimes on exploitative terms (see section 7.7). The illness of household members, combined with powerlessness, and lack of alternative means of getting money, meant that it was extremely difficult for the poorest to retain any productive assets and therefore improve their standard of living.

7.6.4 Respondents' perceptions of assets

Respondents were initially asked about the sequence of sale of assets in times of stress, in order to discover which assets were more important to households and why. This line of enquiry was not followed because of the small number of households reporting more than one sale. Instead Fonogram respondents were asked in which order they would sell during a period of stress five equally priced assets (jewellery, chickens, goats, trees and land). As this mode of questioning usually received only incomplete replies, Bithigram and Keshipur respondents were asked the preferential order in which they would take five items, again of equal value (a cycle, a cow, goats, jewellery or cash). Some respondents thought that they might actually get some of the items mentioned, and others were unable to answer. One Bithigram respondent said ironically: "I'll take all of the things that you've mentioned, thanks." However, respondents' replies, even where incomplete, did give some idea of the relative importance to them of different assets.

Of the 13 Fonogram respondents who replied, chickens were the item to be sold first in 6 cases, and trees in 4 cases. Jewellery was no longer sold, but only mortgaged. Land was in all cases the last asset that would be sold. As one respondent said: "If we sell land we

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[39]Chambers (1983: 127) notes that: 'Sickness emerges as a common cause and form of poverty ratchet.' Tuberculosis was rife in the Lodha *para* of Bithigram.

[40]One crucial asset owned by the poor that has received very little attention is their houses (see Borton and Beck 1990). Housing material may be sold at times of crisis. Housing may be more of a liability than an asset; for example 9 houses of the poorest repondents in Fonogram were badly damaged after the 1986 flooding, which meant either taking large loans for house repair (in 4 cases), living in an unhealthy or dangerous situation, or, in one case, moving. Given that house repair appears to figure so largely in the expenditure of the poor, it is surprising that so little attention has been paid to it in the (mainly urban focussed) literature.

will never get it back, but we can plant more trees or get more hens." Interestingly, 3 respondents also said that they would sell trees or mortgage jewellery first because: "there was a certain attachment to living things." (e.g. livestock).

Of the 8 Bithigram respondents replying, all opted first for a cow (in 7 cases) or goats, and 4 had goats or a cow as their second choice. Of the 14 Keshipur respondents, 9 first chose goats and 5 a cow, with livestock again being the main second choice. Respondents in these two villages therefore chose productive over non-productive assets (and cash). This was clear from the rationale volunteered for their choice by two Keshipur respondents who said: "If we had a cow we would have some income - what use is jewellery?" This finding ties in to the desire that even poorest people had for independence (see section 7.7). It also suggests that the rationale of the IRDP in providing livestock for the poor was not displaced as far as poorest people's priorities are concerned (an issue not usually considered in the literature on IRDP). However, firm conclusions cannot be drawn from such a small sample. More detailed discussion of poor people's priorities as far as assets are concerned awaits a wider survey.

Respondents in the three villages made clear the importance of maintaining productive assets, even if this meant cutting back on their own consumption. This was particularly the case with larger livestock where feed had to be bought for a part of the year.[41] This connects to the importance of such assets in meeting contingencies, as was seen in the Tables above. Having an asset of one's own might mean not having to go (further) into debt when problems invariably arose. It was also clear that poorest households managed their assets with acumen and sold them in the market where possible, and only when they thought absolutely necessary.

7.7 Power and the poorest

7.7.1 Introduction

Chapters five and six showed that in each of the study villages resources and power were held by a small group of households; the effect of this particularly in Fonogram was discussed at some length in terms of access to external resources. This section will conclude the discussion of how poorest people negotiated better positions for themselves within these power structures by describing their views of these structures, what they did to oppose them, and their opinions of other poor people and rich people.

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[41]This may explain the findings of a study over five years in the Kosi hill area of Nepal, where, in response to a development programme, land sales decreased but nutritional status did not improve (Nabarro *et al* 1987).

It is worth recalling the comment by Breman (1985a: 34): 'In India there is a great scarcity of literature in which those living in the lowest echelons of society themselves speak out.' There is a limited amount of micro-level detail on poor people's views on power (see chapter three; Jodha 1989; Khare 1984; BRAC 1984, 1983; Hartmann and Boyce 1983; Freeman 1979; Mencher 1975). However, much work on Indian poverty has ignored the views of the poor. By contrast, this section analyses poor people's attitudes, views and perceptions of subjects that were central to their experience - power and exploitation. Respondents across the 3 villages usually spoke in similar terms, sometimes using the same words and phrases, about the experience of exploitation; below I have selected representative comments of individual respondents to express these commonalities, while at the same time including the views of those who dissented from the majority.

7.7.2 Poorest people and politics

Respondents were asked how well their village was being run, if they were members of or supported any political party, if they knew government sharecropping or minimum wage legislation, and whether they thought the Left Front was doing good work for the poor.

None of the 60 poorest respondents were members of political parties. In Fonogram no poorest respondent knew the minimum wage rate and only 2 respondents knew the terms of sharecropping regulations. Respondents were aware however that recently less land was being hired out because the owners feared the land would be taken over by the sharecropper. The situation in the Midnapore villages was little different, although there was more knowledge about the distribution of *patta* land, as so many of the villagers had received it.

The CPM was the dominant political party in all three villages. Of the 30 respondents who gave a definite answer as to which party they supported, 27 said the CPM. Replies were partly determined by the government's programmes in particular villages. In Fonogram there was disillusionment about politics; in general respondents thought that the CPM were doing little for the poor. They continued to vote for the CPM as the best alternative, and not because they were happy with the party's perfomance. As one woman put it, describing how she decided for whom to vote:

> I will vote for anyone who helps us, and decide for myself. There is no use in voting for any party, but in any case we vote. The party people say they will take us to the voting place by van but we have to walk back anyway, so we say we will walk to the voting place and vote for who we want.

Support for the CPM was most enthusiastic in Bithigram. All of the 14 respondents replying there favoured the CPM, or, as three of them called it, the 'poor people's party'. This enthusiasm was closely tied to the psychological boost involved in the receipt of *patta* and to their present security from violent attacks (see below). Almost all respondents from Bithigram attended mass rallies held by the Left Front in Calcutta and Kharagpur. Attendance was an expression of solidarity with the CPM, but also a day out. Respondents could remember what they were given to eat at the rallies, but not the speeches. For example, one Bithigram respondent said about a rally in Calcutta:

> We were so far away from the speakers at the meetings that we had no idea what they were saying. We don't know reading or writing so what can we understand?

Women also attended CPM women's meetings locally, but could not remember what had been said at them.

Six of the Keshipur respondents were CPM supporters; in general their views were closer to those of Fonogram respondents than their Bithigram neighbours, despite their receipt of *patta* . Women in particular in Fonogram and Keshipur were less interested in politics than men. In Fonogram female respondents who worked in the homestead said that they did not go outside, and so knew nothing about politics. Respondents were not therefore 'political' as far as political organization was concerned.

There was near unanimity of opinion across the 3 villages concerning the work of the local leaders, the *samity* in Fonogram and the *panchayat* in the Midnapore villages. One Bithigram woman summed this up:

> If a *sari* comes for a poor widow then the *panchayat* takes it, if wheat comes we don't get it, paddy seeds come but *panchayat* people say they have come for themselves. *Panchayat* people are taking everything, and becoming rich themselves. They have been able to buy scooters with the money meant for us. But this is not the fault of the CPM government.

Fonogram and Keshipur respondents replied in more or less the same fashion. Of the 21 respondents in Fonogram replying, 11 said that they didn't know if the government was supplying anything but it wasn't coming to them, and 10 said they thought the rich were stealing government aid intended for the poor. In similar vein, a Keshipur respondent said: 'The *panchayat* people are looking after only themselves.' A respondent in Fonogram linked this inablity to receive aid to the powerlessness of the poor:

> A lot of rich people are getting loans, but no goods come to the poor villagers. We don't have anyone who can tell us if these goods are coming or anyone who can go in a group to collect them.

The other direction in which 2 respondents from each of the Midnapore villages and 4 from Fonogram thought government support went was to other local villages. There was some faith in the ability of the central government to provide support for the poor, and this is probably the reason why respondents continued to support the CPM. The village authorities, on the other hand, were viewed with great suspicion and as thieves, and the next section attempts to explain why this was so.

7.7.3 Exploitation, violence and organisation

7.7.3.1 Exploitation

Different forms of exploitation were encountered in the study villages, as seen in chapter five, but in all cases the system of exploitation was founded on control of resources by the better off, on credit lent by shopkeepers and employers which poorest people were forced to take due to their lack of resources, and on low wages. To gauge the level of credit relations, respondents were asked about debts, the reason for taking these, and whether they had to pay interest on them.

As noted in chapter five, most debts in Fonogram were with local shopkeepers. The 19 poorest households interviewed in post-flood Fonogram in 1986-87 who provided definite figures had some 9,900 rupees of outstanding debt, or the large amount of some 500 rupees per household. Of this total amount a little under 45% was owed to one shopkeeper (from household 127 in income group 4), and a further 15% owed to 3 other shopkeepers, two of whom lived outside the village; only 8% of the total involved intra-village loans. Loans with shopkeepers were for food taken on credit, and were regularly 'chalked up' over several months, particularly in the pre-harvest period. In a normal year they would be repaid after the harvest from the earnings from daily labour. Shopkeepers did not charge interest on these loans, but rather charged 10% more for items taken on credit, on top of their existing profits.

In the Midnapore villages in 1988-89 respondents had smaller outstanding debts, some 100 rupees per household in Bithigram and 300 rupees per household in Keshipur. Almost all of this debt was to money lenders, banks or employers. These figures are, however, unrepresentative, because interviews were carried out almost immediately after the *aman* harvest. Under the *dadan* system which operated in the villages, loans were repaid with labour during *aman* , generally at half the market rate (a system which respondents viewed as exploitative - see below). Pre-harvest borrowing from farmers had already been repaid

with labour at the time of the interviews, and respondents would only begin to accumulate debts again from February or March, unless there were major contingencies such as illness. All respondents working as labourers took *dadan* loans, so that if interviews had been carried out four months earlier their debt would have been much higher. Loans from the local shops were restricted in that they had to be repaid within a week, presumably to ensure no competition with the *dadan* arrangement, and shopkeepers charged between 10 and 20% higher rates for items bought on credit (see chapter five for other references to similar exploitative systems).

7.7.3.2 Violence

The prevailing economic and social structures in the study villages were maintained by violence or threats of violence of the rich against the poor. In Bithigram this violence had an unpleasant history. I was told several stories by Lodhas of routine violence against them in the past by *zamindars* and their henchmen. The following is an account from a group interview with six Lodha women and men who spoke of the violence from pre-Left Front Government days:

> A lot of land used to be owned by people in the village. It was taken 40-50 years back by the *zamindar* . Before, if anyone did anything wrong, even something quite small, they would be tied up on the ground by the *zamindar's* henchmen and big stones placed on their chest, and left in the sun all day until 4 o'clock in the afternoon, when they would be released. Sometimes they put on sugar [on the bodies of those tied up like this] so that red ants would come. Some people died from being left like this. The *zamindars* used to take our livestock. When we gathered from the forest we would have to give them half. They burnt down two houses of people still living in the village. They used to beat us very hard, but we could take it because our bodies are so strong. They cut G.L.'s body and rubbed in chillies, they beat him up very badly so that he was taken to hospital. Then G.L. had a cycle and a radio, that is why they beat him so he wouldn't get above his station. They used to accuse the men of stealing standing paddy, and if they couldn't find them they used to come with cloths over their faces and beat the women. The police used to come with them. Since the CPM time this has stopped, and the police are no longer coming.[42]

There were still instances of violence towards villagers. For example, a young Lodha man had been taken into police custody in 1985, accused of stealing electric power lines. After a week the man had died; the police claimed he had hung himself, but the villagers did not believe them. There were also still problems with absentee landlords. One respondent had argued with one of these landlords about a loan he wanted to take three years before the interviews:

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[42]A more recent example of violence by the police and local elite agianst poor tribals in Bangladesh can be found in BRAC (1986).

> He offered me 5 rupees a day to work as a labourer but I told him that I couldn't run my household on that. Then that year at the fair he and his *goondahs* started a problem and blamed it on me, and got the police to take me to jail. He started a court case, and eventually I had to give 550 rupees to pay off the lawyers and the police. I had to sell 600 roof tiles to do this.

The Lodhas appeared to be a particular target because of their past as a 'criminal tribe', and their ethnic separateness. There was also obvious tension between the Lodhas and local farmers, and I heard farmers talking about Lodhas in insulting terms. It was little wonder that the Lodhas were now keen supporters of the CPM, which had stemmed violence against them by absentee landlords, even if exploitation still continued.

In Fonogram and Keshipur violence was concentrated within the villages. One example of violence, organized by the *samity* , took place against a Fonogram poorest respondent, Asgar, because he had broken village social norms and organized an illicit love affair between two villagers. In the summer of 1987 Asgar's house was broken down, his household expelled from the village, and Asgar was so badly beaten that four of his ribs were broken. Unable to work, the household sold their only asset, a cycle van, at a much lower rate than its market value. Eventually Asgar contracted tuberculosis from which he died in 1988.

In Keshipur during the period in which interviews were being carried out, relatives of the *panchayat* chairman were intimidating their neighbours, two women who lived in one of the respondent households. The women said that drunk men from their neighbours' house came at night and beat them. They went on:

> We don't have any men in our family so the people next door want to take our homestead land. They have everything and we have nothing. They drink and come and cause a problem. They say they will come back and beat us some more. They have cut down our trees and taken them for themselves and bought wristwatches with the money they got.

The day after this interview, a chicken belonging to the two women was killed. They accused their neighbours, and as I watched one of the women plucking the chicken and shouting retribution at her neighbours (her only weapon at that point being the power of her voice that was informing all the village of her case), the *panchayat* chairman, who was also the school teacher, came to talk to me and explained that poor people got into such trouble because they were ignorant.

It is difficult to know how widespread such violence was, and how to interpret clashes, as there were constant arguments and occasional fights in all three villages between various parties, including between poor people. It was clear however that for the poorest to be

involved in an open conflict with more powerful neighbours or outsiders was potentially disastrous, and also that the threat of violence or violence itself was integral to poverty.

7.7.3.3 Organisation

Poorest households had little open response to exploitation and violence. I have described above some of the 'everyday forms of resistance' to exploitation, such as cutting down trees of the rich and theft. Insulting the rich (albeit behind their backs) was another form of protest (see below). It was in Bithigram with its separate *paras* and different ethnic groups that there was most organisation among the poor and poorest. The group of Lodhas who told me about past violence during the pre-Left Front Government period also told me of the response by Lodha and other villagers after the Left Front came to power:

> A mass of people from about 30 villages went to the *zamindars* house and tried to break it down. We couldn't do it because it was made of brick, but the *zamindar* ran away. Slowly the house was ruined as it was left empty after that.[43]

In 1988-89 and for several years previous to this Lodha households had organised as a group concerning bargaining for wage rates for work on the *aman* harvest. A female respondent described the bargaining process in this way:

> There are women's meetings (arranged by the CPM) before the harvest and we are told not to work for too little pay. We decide on 3 kgs of rice or 10 rupees for a day's work. Then there is a meeting in the village every pre-harvest time - the *panchayat*, farmers and poor people come together to decide the rate, then the *panchayat* gives the order concerning the amount. It we don't get the right rate after that then we stop work in protest for a day, or until we get the right price.[44]

There was less organisation in Fonogram and Keshipur. In Fonogram the wage rate for agricultural labourers was already comparatively high, although wages in the local factories owned by absentee landlords were very low. Village meetings, called by the *samity*, did take place to decide on the rent for sharecropped land during the *boro* season and other important issues. Respondents in Fonogram thought poor people could not get organized like rich people for two reasons. The first reply (in 12 cases) was because of jealousy (*hingsha*), which was caused by lack of resources, and meant there was no unity among the poor. The second (in 3 cases) was because of powerlessness, or as one respondent put

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[43]This was presumably during the first period of Left Front Government in 1967-1970, when there were major confrontations between the poor and landowners throughout West Bengal.

[44]A similar process of bargaining over wages was described to me in Sahajapur village in Birbhum District.

it: "The rich won't let poor people form a union. If they did then they wouldn't be able to cheat us so much."

7.7.4 The experience of poverty - poorest people's views of the rich and the poor, and the causes of their poverty

To examine respondents' experience of poverty, I asked why they thought they were poor, whose fault this was, what poor and rich people were like, whether the rich helped or cheated the poor, and if the poor helped or cheated each other.

In chapters two and three I discussed the 'moral economy' theory and how it has been used to explain both the supposed passivity of the poor and, during its breakdown, protest against the decline of a system that provided subsistence to all the rural population. Some authors (e.g. Greenough 1982: 183) claim that the: '....moral bonds of patronage were, and are, a principal mechanism of cohesion in Bengali society.' (and see also Davis 1983: 36, 46). What were poorest people's views of the rich in the three villages? Given that agriculture in the Midnapore villages was mainly based on the *aman* season, and there were fewer market linkages than in Fonogram, it might have been expected that 'moral economy' relations would have been found in the more 'traditional' settings of Bithigram and Keshipur. However, there was much common ground in responses in all three villages, as will be seen below, and respondents' replies are therefore discussed together.

7.7.4.1 Causes of poverty

As to why they thought they were poor, responses were fairly standard. Respondents gave a number of different reasons, but these centred around lack of assets, and fate.[45] Forty one respondents out of the total of 60 said specifically that they were poor because they had either lost or not inherited any land; most of the others either thought it was because they couldn't work, because they had no education, or were less intelligent than the rich (in the case of 3 of the Lodhas), or could not say why. When asking whose fault respondents' poverty was, most thought that this was their own fault, or caused by their fate. For the latter explanation they used the popular colloquial Bengali phrase "I have bad luck written on my forehead" (*Amar koppal upore lekha kharap*), meaning that they were intended by fate or god to be poor. Respondents were quite explicit about this. As a woman in Keshipur said: "It is not right to say that because other people have land we are poor. It is our own fault we are poor." A woman in Fonogram said more or less the same: "We are poor because we don't have anything - I don't blame the rich for my poverty. I have bad luck."

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[45]Siddiqui (1982: 235) reports similar findings from a Bangladesh study village.

By contrast, 7 respondents in Bithigram blamed the rich for their poverty. In 4 cases this was because their ancestors had been cheated out of their land by the *zamindars* , and in one case because farmers did not give out land to the poor for sharecropping. The other two respondents linked together present day exploitation and their poverty, the only ones among the 60 respondents to do so. One was the Lodha man mentioned above who had lost money after being taken to court by an absentee landlord. The other was a Lodha man who was extremely bitter about the Mahatos in Bithigram. He said: "It's rich people's fault we are poor, even now rich people in our village are trying to keep us poor." When I asked him where he got these ideas from he said: "We haven't heard this from anybody, it comes into our own minds."

7.7.4.2 Views of the rich

Although for the most part respondents did not blame the rich for their poverty, they were clear about what they thought of the rich. Forty three respondents, 39 of whom came from Fonogram and Bithigram, thought that the rich cheated the poor. Fourteen respondents did not reply or could not answer, and only 3 said that the rich did not cheat the poor. The main forms of cheating as far as the respondents were concerned were either, in most cases, paying too little as salary for the amount of work done by respondents (under the *dadan* system or otherwise), or, in fewer cases, paying too little for assets bought.

Respondents were also adamant that the rich did not help the poor. Only 6 respondents thought the rich helped the poor. Three of these were in Fonogram, and were receiving benefits from a 'patron-client' relationship. All of the other 53 households (with one non-response) were emphatic that the rich did not help the poor. A woman in Fonogram said bitterly: "The rich don't help the poor and they never did." Rather than helping the poor, the rich tried to harm their interests, as the following representative quotes show:

> Man in Fonogram:
> Rich people beat and eat the poor (*gorib mere khai*), they hit poor people and earn their profit.
>
> Widow in Fonogram:
> Rich people don't give any help, they try and hurt the poor more.
>
> Woman in Fonogram:
> If we borrow 10 rupees from a rich person, we have to repay 12 rupees. If I died a rich person wouldn't even give me the earth to be buried in.
>
> Man in Bithigram:
> Rich people have everything they need, they don't give us anything, they cheat us 100 times, we have to work for them for 3 rupees. Rich people would never help us, even if we were dying they wouldn't give us 10 rupees.

Woman in Keshipur:
Rich people don't help the poor, they hate us, they can't bear to look at us.

Widow in Keshipur:
If I go to rich people for help they will say we have no rice. When there is no food in the house if we go to rich people's houses to ask for food they won't even talk to us.[46]

As the quote from the man in Bithigram suggests, respondents saw their poverty in relative terms. Economists might debate about poverty lines and whether or not there is an absolute core to poverty, but for respondents the experience of poverty was seen as relative to the welfare of others, and their comments show the narrowness of academics' preoccupation with absolute poverty measures of income or nutrition. An elderly widow in Keshipur put this most clearly and simply: "If I live next to someone who is a bit better off, who manages to eat and I don't, then I feel poor." There were many other such comments, most of which noted the disparity of ownership of assets between rich and poor, and some of which specifically compared the different lifestyles of the two groups. Of the latter, the following are colourful but also representative:

Woman in Fonogram:
Rich people don't look after the poor at all - even if we were dying and we called them they wouldn't come. Jyonal is going by motorcycle, Romesh by lorry and Daoud by cycle. I am going by foot, shoeless. In the rainy season rich people will eat good food, the poor will eat fig leaves, get sick and have to go to the doctor.

Man in Bithigram:
In the summer rich people can stay inside out of the sun, they will shout down at us from their houses: "Work harder, cut my trees", but if we were hungry they wouldn't give us a piece of puffed rice.

Woman in Bithigram:
All our land was taken a long time back by *zamindars* . They took the land of the poor, and now they say "Poor people can die, what do we care?" If we had 4-5 bighas of land we could live like human beings, but we don't have that. Look at the colour of our skin, we take salt tea and have to go out in the heat of the summer, so we are dark. The daughters of rich people stay indoors and keep fair complexions. Rich people have land, rice, nice houses, they eat lots of vegetables. They have no problems.

This abuse was one 'weapon of the weak' as Scott (1985) has shown. Insulting rich people and making fun of their lifestyle (while at the same time envying it) as these respondents were doing by commenting on the 'characteristics' of the rich, was one way of attacking

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[46]Compare this quote from a poor person noted by Scott (1985: 12-13) in his Malaysian study village: 'The rich are arrogant. We greet them and they don't greet us back. They don't talk to us; they don't even look at us!' Very similar comments by the poor about the rich in Bangladesh can be found in Yunus (1984: 42) and Chen (1983: 151).

the rich (see also the views of the eating habits of rich above). In this one area respondents were well off - their ability to use language to abuse or mock the rich.[47] Again and again respondents accused their rich neighbours of not helping them despite their wealth, and also of a lack of humanity, not being willing to help if poor people were sick or even dying. This was one method of trying to extract more support from the rich. In Fonogram this was linked to the fact that in the eyes of respondents, and in the wake of irrigation development, the poor were getting poorer and the rich richer. Respondents there, as the woman quoted above, usually accused the three main members of the village *samity* as gainers of an unfair and immoral system. The situation thus existed (peculiar perhaps to outsiders' eyes) that the poor were virtually unanimous in their dislike of the rich, but at the same time did not make a conscious connection between their poverty and other's wealth. This issue is explored further below.

7.7.4.3 Solidarity among the poor

In marked contrast to their feelings towards the rich, there was a large degree of perceived solidarity among the poorest in all three villages, united as they were in their hostility towards the rich. This was partly because the poorest were often related, and tended to help their relatives (although they were also related to richer people in some cases). While most respondents did not think that the poor could work together, 53 of the 60 respondents thought that the poor helped each other, with 6 saying that they didn't and one non-respondent. This help was mainly in the form of small loans of rice, oil, salt or money. Small sums of money were frequently transferred between poorest households, and almost all of the 53 households were or had been involved in such transactions. Sums of money or amounts of goods lent could also be quite large if the need arose; for example, in Bithigram and Keshipur respondents reported lending up to 200 rupees and 40 kgs. of paddy to another poor or poorest household. Other forms of help commonly mentioned were looking after children or livestock if a household member was ill, and taking sick people to the hospital or doctor.

Small loans were common enough to be unremarkable. They worked on the basis that households shared with others in need what they had, and borrowed when they were in need themselves. This reciprocal borrowing was often negotiated between women, particularly in the case of small amounts of food. Respondents stressed that despite the difficult situation other poor people were in, they still helped out when they could. As one woman in Fonogram said: "If poor people have anything they will loan it to each other." Even if the quantities were small, these reciprocal arrangements were very important to repondents as they showed a solidarity among the poor, in contrast to the hostility towards

[47]Compare Scott (1985: chapter one).

them of the rich. However much time had passed since the loan, respondents were clear that a loan from another poor person had to be repaid as a matter of honour. Another woman in Fonogram said:

> Poor people help each other, if we didn't help one another then we wouldn't get help in times of need. I get salt, oil, rice and money from other poor people.

Others expressed this sentiment in almost the same terms. These loans among the poor were particularly important in times of illness or if there were other major contingencies, again in contrast to the perceived stinginess of the rich in these circumstances. Two respondents also expressed the feeling of the common experience of the poor.

> Widow in Keshipur:
> Rich people say: "If I give money to a poor person I won't get it back", but a poor person will lend to me, they understand my sorrow.
>
> Woman in Fonogram:
> Rich people are bad, they never give any help. Poor people understand each other's poverty so they help each other.[48]

Loans from the rich, much larger than the loans from the poor, were not seen as help but as a form of contract in which the poor were cheated. In contrast, loans among the poor were seen as help (*shahajo*). It was the quality of the relationship between lender and borrower that therefore mattered to the poorest, as much as the size of the loan.[49]

In South Asia, the literature on mutual support networks has been placed in the context of the moral economy debate, and the increasing importance of networks among the poor as former client-patron networks break down (e.g. Van Schendel 1989; Platteau 1988; Breman 1985a). Whether or not this break down is taking place, there is agreement among a large number of authors of the importance of such networks to the poor for their survival. These studies describe similar networks to those found in the study villages here (e.g. Dasgupta 1987: 114; Caldwell *et al* 1986; Howes and Jabbar 1986: 25; Chen 1983; Siddiqui 1982: 48. For an overview of the literature on networks among women in South Asia, see Agarwal 1989a: 25-8). While authors have considered the extent and erosion of

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[48]Similar remarks made by poor people in Bangladesh concerning their solidarity are reported in White (1988: 321) and Hartmann and Boyce (1983: 98).

[49]This was the perceived reality of most respondents. I heard of many past and present disputes in the study villages within poor households and families, and between women and men, particularly over land. However, in response to my questions almost all respondents presented a picture of solidarity rather than friction.

such networks, very few however appear to have considered as well the value that the poor place on these.[50]

Given this solidarity, it is worth questioning the view proposed by Sen (1983: 161):

> In a poor community.... the perception of poverty is primarily concerned with the commodity requirements of fulfilling nutritional needs and perhaps some needs of being clothed, sheltered and free from disease. This is the world of Charles Booth or Seebohm Rowntree.... and that of poverty estimation, say, in India. The more physical needs tend to dominate over the needs of communal participation.[51]

My field level evidence calls into question such a formulation as to how poverty is perceived in a 'poor community', and, by extension, the absolutist approach to poverty Sen espouses.

While a limited number of 'moral economic' arrangements did exist in the villages, from the viewpoint of respondents the basic feature of the rich-poor relationship across the 3 villages was antagonism, and respondents had very similar views despite the different levels of agricultural 'development' of their villages. This antagonism, however, was complicated by respondents' views of the causality of poverty, and also by the importance respondents placed on self respect, which is discussed in the next section.

7.7.5 Poverty and self respect

In section 7.4.3 it was seen that self respect was valued more highly than food by 49 out of 58 respondents. Respondents were well aware that, no matter how poor they became, they needed to live as social beings, and to receive respect from others to maintain their own self respect. As a Fonogram woman said: "Self respect is more important than food; no matter how poor you are you want to keep some self respect." This attitude meant that in order to retain self respect respondents were keen to adhere to the norms of village life. This was true of female respondents in Fonogram, 6 of whom said that they maintained self respect because they did not go outside of their homestead. Whether or not this adherence to *purdah* norms, which were one of the main forms of women's

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[50]Bandyopadhyay and von Eschen (1988) on the other hand found very little networking of any kind in a 21 village study of West Bengal in 1972-74. There is also a substantial literature on mutual support networks among the poor in Africa which may be comparable to that from South Asia (dependent on agro-ecological and social context). See for example Rahmato (1988: 7), Longhurst (1986: 30) and Toulmin (1986: 66), and for a review of relevant literature Dreze and Sen (1989: chapter five).

[51]See also Lipton (1983a: 66), for a similar view.

oppression (as seen from an outsider's viewpoint), constitutes 'participation in one's own repression' is beyond the scope of the discussion here.[52]

Respondents in the 3 villages were asked if their self respect had gone up or down in the last 10-20 years (i.e. during the period of Left Front rule). Replies partly depended on the village context. In Fonogram most respondent households had experienced economic decline. Nineteen of the 22 respondents replying said that their self respect had declined, and linked this to their loss of land or labour power, as well as to their shunning by the rich.[53] In Keshipur, where a similar process of economic decline had occurred, partly counteracted by the government development programmes, in 8 cases respondents thought that their self respect had declined, and in 5 cases that it had remained the same.

By contrast in Bithigram 15 of the 19 households thought that their self respect had increased. This they linked directly to the role of the CPM and to their receipt of *patta* land. They also linked this to the fact that rather than being seen as criminals and outcasts by the Mahato farmers, as formerly, these farmers now offered the Lodhas a place to sit in their houses. There was here therefore a similar paradox to the situation of the female respondents in Fonogram who supported *purdah* norms. The same woman who commented on the complexion of the daughters of the rich also said, as did several of the other Bithigram respondents: "Self respect is more important for us. Ten to fifteen years ago we didn't have any self respect, now farmers tell us to sit in their houses and give us tea." As some of the other comments quoted here show (for example the widow in Keshipur quoted above who said that rich people did not even talk to the poor when the latter asked for food), and despite their hostility towards the rich, respondents were keen to keep good relations with them. This appeared to be from more than pragmatism; respondents wanted to be treated as neighbours and accepted as human beings even by those who they saw as cheating them. Poorest people's priorities may therefore be complex, and they may retain 'multiple identities'.[54]

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[52]This matter is also considered by White (1988: 145-6), and Arens and Van Beurden (1977: 62). The importance of self respect to the poor in South Asia is also commented on in Agarwal 1989b: WS59; Jodha 1989; Chambers 1988; and BRAC 1984: 27-8.

[53]Van Schendel (1981: 92) also notes from village Bangladesh that self respect is closely linked to wealth, but not identical with it.

[54]The maintenance by individuals of paradoxical views, and the differences between perception and 'reality', are major subjects of study in their own right (see for example the discussions in Dreze and Sen 1989, and the discussion of 'mental-metricism' in chapters two and five). There is no scope to discuss these subjects further here, but it should be noted that to consider poor people's perceptions in terms of 'false' or nascent consciousness may mean the imposition of an alien ideology onto the poor. For a critique of Gramsci's notion of false consciousness, and a discussion of 'multiple identities' see Scott (1985, especially chapter 8).

Here, Thompson's view of the poor and rich as 'mutually bound' can be seen to operate at different levels. The poorest in the study villages did demand what they saw as rights - use of land, CPRs, livestock or credit. When these were denied they demanded them by insulting the rich, as several of the quotes above have shown. They were mutually bound in a social sense as well, in that, as social beings, the poorest were concerned with the opinions that the rich held of them, and did not hesitate to express their own opinions about the rich.

One final point about poorest people's long term priorities can be made. Respondents were asked what hopes they had for their children. Of the 40 who had children and replied, 7 said that they would like to marry off their children well, 4 said they would like land for their children, and 25 said that they wanted to send their children to school to learn how to read and write. Some respondents linked this desire for education for their children to their own powerlessness, for example in the way that they were cheated by shopkeepers or employers because they were illiterate, and others said that if their daughters could read and write they would make a better marriage. Literacy also meant greater self respect. As one man in Bithigram put it: "I will put my kids into school. If they learn how to read and write they won't have to labour all their lives." Respondents recognised the difficulties of sending children to school given their own poverty and the income 'working' children brought in, but were still determined that the children should attend school for a better future.[55]

7.8 Conclusions

This chapter has provided extensive evidence of the activities and capabilities of the poorest, both the quantitative importance of different strategies in terms of time and money, as well as the social relations involved in survival, and poorest people's perceptions of these. Much of the material in the chapter is original either in its findings or presentation. The experience of poverty can be seen to be 'integrated', as Chambers (1983) has suggested, and involves little power, few assets, illiteracy, exploitation, and a constant pursuit for subsistence fuelled by unskilled labour and use of any social and natural resources available. It was evident as well that despite their disadvantages, the poorest were

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55The similarity to some of Jodha's (1989) findings concerning self respect from his survey of two villages in Rajasthan can be noted here. In particular, one of the main ways in which poorer villagers perceived that their situation had improved over time was through '....reduced reliance ....on traditional patrons, landlords and resourceful people for sustenance, employment and income.' (ibid.: 182). Jodha's findings are discussed in chapter two.

interested in the quality of their lives, and in self respect, and held strong views on the characteristics of the better off in their villages. Also, paradoxically, poorest people did not make a connection between their poverty and other's wealth, and this may relate to their powerlessness. The poorest did not, quite, meet Thompson's requirement that (1986: 9-10): '....class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences, feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs.' But, as was apparent in Bithigram, respondents could function as a class even though they did not 'articulate the identity of their interests'; but it is possible to hypothesize that if the poorest did make a causal connection between the causes of their poverty and others' wealth, this would increase the impetus to organization.

To focus on poorest people's abilities does not mean that the poorest can manage without external assistance. The death of four adults from respondent households in Fonogram, including 2 respondents, during the period of my field work, showed that survival strategies did not always work. However, although their options were severely restricted, the poorest made use of local opportunities available. Development planning could pay more attention to such indigenous strategies of the poorest that have been negotiated through power structures and within local environments, and that might provide a base for future planning. Use of CPRs, share-rearing of livestock and the existence of mututal support groups are examples of such strategies, and there may be others that have escaped notice.

As argued throughout this thesis, the concentration by poverty measurers on nutritional minima and levels of income needed to survive ignores power, the experience of poverty, and poor people as agents. The historical dimension to this agency has been discussed in chapters three and four, and it is in the context of this history of 'everyday forms of poor people's survival and resistance', much of it unwritten, that the present findings should be placed.

CHAPTER EIGHT
Conclusions

This thesis has concentrated on poverty and development in three villages of two contrasting agro-ecological regions of West Bengal. In this conclusion I would like to draw some general conclusions from the material presented. I emphasize that these will be conclusions, rather than a summary of the findings that have come before.

The first conclusion concerns the relation between poverty and policy. In every study of poverty, even in studies where the poor are reduced to statistical data sets, there is an implicit or explicit value judgement as to the nature of poor people. Chapter two is a case study of the relation between the way in which poor people are conceptualized and policy formation. The economic literature that currently dominates discussions of poverty in India was seen to follow in a tradition that has viewed the poor as irrational and passive, but, paradoxically, potentially dangerous if organized by external forces. Such a conceptualization restricts policy making, and in it poor people are denied talents or abilities. The literature reviewed in chapter three specifically addresses and challenges this approach, and it is this literature that this thesis has followed in questioning sterile economic analysis. This alternative tradition, drawing its roots from people's history, has viewed the poor as those who can contribute to, form and reform the societies of which they are a part. Policy for the writers in the people's history tradition should not come from 'above'; it can be made with or even by poor people, and is sometimes made by the poor despite local elites, institutions or the state. Equally, contemporary populist writers on rural development have stressed the strengths and knowledge of the poor, and the need for the state or other concerned parties to build on these, and this approach was followed in this thesis. It is noteworthy that while the trend to statistical analysis of poverty received great impetus in the latter half of the nineteenth century in Britain, opposition to such analysis has come from Marxist historians who have attempted to re-write the history of that period from a different perspective, and whose work has been influential in directing the nature, approach and choice of subject matter of this thesis.

Following from the discussion of these two contrasting and oppositional traditions, this thesis has also stressed the need to examine poverty in its socio-economic context, using the shorthand terms 'agency' and 'structure' to describe the complex sets of relations whereby individuals and groups interact with other individuals and institutions. By the nature of its genus - a locally based field study - the thesis has been concerned mainly with agency and structure at village level, although it did also examine in chapter four, in less detail, contextualizing features of the agrarian structure at state level. This concern with the

interaction of agency and structure leads back to the nature of conceptualisation of the poor. If structure is over-stressed, the poor can be viewed as passive recipients of state or elite policy or ideology. If agency is over-stressed, the poor can be seen as responsible for their own poverty. Thus, in the literature on the nineteenth century poor in Britain the poor were seen as agents, but their agency was of a negative kind which meant that, through ignorance and apathy, the cause of poverty lay with them, while structure was ignored.

Similarly, it was noted in chapter three, with various thematic examples, that authors focussing on agency have historically had difficulty analysing the socio-economic forces or structures constraining that agency. To analyse the interaction of different levels of agency and structure, for example at household, community, village, region and international levels, remains an immense challenge for social scientists.

The second conclusion concerns rural development. The field work chapters in this thesis have contrasted two differing forms of development. The first kind, discussed in chapter six, involved external intervention and capital, and, in the case of Fonogram, substantial benefits accruing to those already largely in control of village resources. The evidence presented was of course only from one village (with supplementary information from the Midnapore villages), but adds to growing evidence concerning the green revolution and other development programmes in India, that external resources, particularly those under government programmes, are mediated by village socio-economic structure, and benefit in particular a small elite. In the case of Fonogram the village elite were benefitted to the relative (but not the absolute) detriment of the poor. A process of partial proletarianization was seen to be taking place in Fonogram that would in all probability contribute further to already existing intra-village friction and tensions.

This form of external intervention was contrasted to what can be termed indigenous rural development, which was analysed in chapter seven. This chapter examined how poorest people themselves negotiated with the rich and manipulated or attempted to manipulate village socio-economic structures to maintain or improve their living standards and quality of life. It focussed on the abilities and capabilities of the poor themselves, using the latter term not in the narrow sense that is has been used in particular by Sen (see Dreze and Sen 1989), but to consider areas of particular importance to the poorest, these also being the areas where they had the greatest capability to shape their own lives and the formation of their society. It outlined survival strategies from an informal economy operated to a large extent by women, strategies that had been tried and tested, such as gathering of CPRs or sharerearing of livestock, that either benefitted poor and rich, or benefitted the poor but not to the detriment of the interests of the rich. In doing so the

chapter suggested areas where external intervention could support strategies used by the poor, and it is possible to conclude that programmes supporting such strategies could usefully supplement existing development schemes.

One of the main findings of the thesis is therefore that the poor in the case study villages were certainly not passive or inert, but also that their considerable initiative and capabilities are seriously constrained by the unequal relations in which they find themselves, and this finding was supported by empirical research from elsewhere in South Asia. Left to themselves, therefore, the poor will only be able to do so much in their struggles for an everyday living and in the 'negotiations' and struggles with the elites from their villages. The thesis also stressed the importance of taking into account the viewpoint of the poor, recognizing at the same time time how this viewpoint is shaped by the environment with which the poor interact. This is necessary because ideology in many cases affects action. In their relations with the rich and in their everyday lives the poorest people interviewed held paradoxical views about power and self respect, views which resulted from their necessity of living in close proximity to their employees and sources of credit. At the same time two points were clear. Firstly, the poorest stressed the importance of self respect, something to them which was more important than food. Measurers of poverty should take note of the importance of self respect to the poor, for studies that focus with such near obsession on single indicators of poverty such as income or nutritional intake are presenting a perspective that may in the long run be harmful to the poor because of its misrepresentation of what poverty actually is (a point also made in the empirical longitudional research of Jodha, 1989). Secondly, poorest people hated the rich in their villages, even if they did not connect their own poverty to others' wealth. Insults, theft and other forms of resistance by the poorest were the main everyday means of expressing this hatred.

In the sense that it is often used in studies of India (outlined in chapter two), the moral economy or patron-client relations satisfactory to both parties, did not exist in the three study villages, and one may wonder if such a relationship ever existed in the form postulated. E.P. Thompson's concept of the moral economy, with the rich and poor bound in a ring of mutual need and antagonism, was seen to be a fitting concept to describe the struggle between poor and rich in the study villages over resources and ideology, a struggle which manifested itself over such seemingly mundane issues as access to fields for gleaning, cattle for share-rearing, or loans from shop-keepers. In fact, the struggles concerning the informal economy in early and mid-nineteenth century rural Britain and contemporary rural West Bengal revealed a degree of congruence that makes one conjecture about common forms of exploitation and class relations in industrialising societies.

Concerning the definition of poverty, some authors, whose work was discussed in chapters two and three, have suggested that 'vulnerability' or 'deprivation' are more precise words than poverty in terms of defining the social experience of the poor. Both words have their drawbacks, and I have preferred to use 'poverty'. The aim of the thesis was not, however, to re-define the term 'poverty' or to specify or label the poorest. Rather, it was to examine the capabilities of a roughly defined group of the poorest in specific local settings, a quite different form of social science to that involved in most studies of poverty. Again, it is important to distinguish between studies that on the one hand develop indicators of poverty, and those that on the other attempt to show how the poor think or what the poor do. Combining the two latter areas of enquiry is a difficult but probably essential task if there is to be a full understanding of the meaning and nature of poverty, and an exercise attempted in this thesis. Explicit in the conduct of such an exercise is a recognition of the poor as people capable of contributing to, and not just being directed by, policy.

The third conclusion concerns specificity - both the specifics of the poor person's experience and how poverty is reproduced in specific settings. The focus in this thesis on two agro-ecological regions has facilitated the latter. If poverty is to be understood it must be understoood in context, and understanding the poor person's experience and the context of that experience can help challenge simplistic approaches to poverty. Such a holistic understanding of social process is one step on the road to social change.

One important finding of the thesis relating to specificity concerns ethnicity. Ethnicity was one of several factors considered when selecting study villages, as tribals are generally considered to be among the poorest in India. At the end of the study, given the intra-village differences found and the findings concerning exploitation and the tribals resistance to it, I realized that ethnicity should have been a more important factor in choice of study villages, the more so given that West Bengal has a tribal 'fringe' around it developed historically and geographically as a response to the need to colonise outlying areas of the state (see Bose 1986). Future research on poverty could productively compare non-tribal and tribal areas, with ethnicity being the determining variable in choice of study regions.

It would be pleasant to be able come to an optimistic conclusion about poverty and poor people's futures in the areas studied. However, in the ring binding poor and rich, the rich - themselves feeling, thinking and capable agents - have a strong upper hand. Focussing on poor people capabilities should not detract from the extraordinary difficulties faced by the poor, nor should it suggest that all of the poor are equally capable of eliminating their own poverty. The poor people I spoke to in the study villages will probably continue to eke out a living on the margins of tolerable existence, and continue to be insulted, exploited, sick,

hungry and angry. Several poorest respondents said, with Shakespearean bleakness, that they had no hope and no future. However, their ability to support each other, their sense of mutual suffering, as well as their sense of humour, which all act as a weapon against the rich and a means of self preservation, may help them through, along with the other strategies outlined above. This thesis is a testament to their ability not only to survive in appalling conditions, but to do so as warm human beings.

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Abbreviations

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IDS	Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex
ILO	International Labour Office
JDS	Journal of Development Studies
JPS	Journal of Peasant Studies
WBSWP	World Bank Staff Working Paper

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Appendix 4.1
Background to the case study districts, 24 Parganas and Midnapore

This Appendix gives details of the two districts in which this study took place, 24 Parganas and Midnapore (see map 4.1), as a means of contextualising the information given about the study villages in chapters five, six and seven. Reasons for selection of these districts are given in chapter five.

24 Parganas District

24 Parganas, or to be more specific north 24 Parganas (a large part of south 24 Parganas being taken up by the Sunderban forests), is the main study area. It is representative of the moribund delta as a whole in terms of rainfall, and also numbers of agricultural labourers and the amount of land under tenancy (Boyce 1987: 225). The district is covered by alluvium, which is often of a great depth. Soils in north 24 Parganas are mainly sandy and clayey loams, and are double cropped (Mitra 1953: 119).

Historically, north 24 Parganas has been a deficit rice area, and cropping patterns have been partly determined by proximity to Calcutta. Kelly (1985: 77-102) has described the changing patterns of land use in north 24 Parganas in the the nineteenth century, when (ibid.: 2):

> Farmers responded to much more than direct compulsion, and East India Company and European entrepreneur encouragement, to cultivate a few export crops. They spontaneously and continuously adjusted their cropping pattern to changing economic opportunities and physical conditions.

From the middle of the nineteenth century, a large proportion of suitable higher farm land was already given up to cash crops, particularly pulses, sugar cane, tobacco and jute. The market close by in Calcutta also stimulated cash cropping. Farmers manipulated the different heights and types of land under cultivation to diversify crop production, and a common pattern of *aman* paddy followed by *robi* cash crops was set by the 1870's (ibid.: 77-102). Bardhan (1988: 511) suggests that 24 Parganas is an agriculturally stagnant area, and growth in the state has been below the West Bengal average for 1949-1980 (Boyce 1987: 259). However, the north of the district is more productive than the south; this north/south division is supported by figures which show that, for the total area of the district agricultural productivity in 24 Parganas in 1971 was about 60% of the average West Bengal figure, but for gross-cropped area (which would exclude much of south 24 Pargnanas, it is about average (Boyce 1987: 143).

Midnapore District

Midnapore, the second case study district, lies to the west of Calcutta, bordering on Orissa (Map 4.1). Midnapore is divided into east and west by the Orissa trunk road. And, as Mitra puts it (1953: 117):

> The characteristic formation of the district is laterite which occupies nearly the whole country in the north and west, but in the south and east gives way to the alluvium of the Gangetic delta.

In the alluvial tract soils are mainly clay, loam and sandy loam, and in the laterite tract mostly loam and sandy loam (ibid.: 130). According to Kelly (1985: chapter five), before the 1850's agriculture in Midnapore was well adapted to differing soil qualities and heights, with *aus* and *aman* paddy grown on lower and middle slopes, and drought resistant cereals on upper slopes. However, between 1850 and 1900 land use patterns were simplified. Agriculture became heavily commercialised as local and external demand grew, with *aman* rice the main cash crop. Former niche patterns of cropping broke down as *aman* spread to upper slopes, leading to decreasing soil fertility, decrease in water availability and deforestation on upper slopes. Much of the *sal* forest that covered this area has now disappeared, partly due to pressure on land, and 'aman' still predominates. Midnapore is one of the most agriculturally backward of West Bengal districts (Boyce 1987: 259), although the soil becomes progressively more productive as one moves eastwards.

As in 24 Parganas, the percentages of labourers and tenants in Midnapore is representative of the moribund delta (Boyce 1987: 225). One distinguishing feature of Midnapore is the relatively high proportion of *adibhashi* or tribal population - 8% in 1981 (Bose and Bhadoria 1987: 17). To the west of the district is one of those frontier regions where, according to Bose (1986: 17-18), from the middle of the nineteenth century tribals were dispossessed of their land by Hindu outsiders.

Appendix 4.2
Micro- and meso-level findings concerning the agrarian structure in West Bengal

Table A4.1 Land ownership by class: evidence from five micro- and meso-level studies in West Bengal

	land-less(a)	poor	medium/ middle	rich	land-lord
a) % of h/holds	28	41	31	-	-
bi)% of h/holds	58	21	14	3	4
% of land owned	-	26	24	11	39
bii)% of h/holds	12(A)	52	32	4	-
% of land owned	-	35	52	13	-
ci)% of h/holds	63(B)	12	12	13	
% of land owned	2	5	13	80	
cii)% h/holds(C)	49	19	6	9	
% of land owned	5	12	16	58	
di)% of h/holds(D)	42	9	42		-
dii)% of h/holds (E)	66	4	29		-
e)% h/holds (F)	36	9	29	14	1

Notes:
(a) - Categories below are those used in the study unless otherwise stated
(A) - 'Peasant proletariat' is used rather than 'landless'
(B) - For studies c and d 'labourer' is used rather than 'landless'
(C) - 'Others' equal 17%
(D) - 'Others' equal 7%
(E) - 'Others' equal 11%
(F) - 'Others' equal 11%
All figures have been rounded.

Table A4.2 Percentage of land owned in acres: evidence from seven micro- and meso-level studies in West Bengal (a)

I	landless	<1	1-2.5	2.5-5	5-10		>10
% h/holds	15	42	25	12	5		1
% land owned	-	12	25	27	22		13
II	landless	0-1	1-2.5	2.5-5	5-10		>10
% h/holds	35	29	16	13	5		2
% land owned	-	11	19	31	24		15
III	< 0.5	.5-1	1-2.5	2.5-5	5-10		>10
% h/holds	52	15	21	7	4		1
IV	<1	1-2		2-5	5-10		>10
% h/holds	10	9		13	62		26
% land owned	1	2		7	36		30
V	<0.1	0.1-2.5		2.5-7.5		>7.5	
% h/holds	27	40		28		5	
VI	landless	<1	1-3	3-5	>5		
% h/holds	36	18	22	10	14		
% land owned (b)	-	3	19	18	59		
VII	<0.62	0.62- 3.1		>3.1			
% h/holds	28	54		18			

(a) Underlined figures are the units of classification used in the studies. All figures have been rounded.
(b) Does not include land let out to sharecroppers or leased out to tenants. If this is included, 83% of land is owned by the above 5 acres category.

Sources for Table 4.1A

Sources	District	No. of villages	Year(s) of survey
a) Davis (1983: 102)	Midnapore	1	1971-2; 1977
b) Bose			
i) (1984: 92)	Birbhum	3	1974-6
ii)(1984: 92)	Purulia	1	1974-6
c) Harriss			
i) (1984: 39)	Birbhum	1	1982
ii)(1984: 41)	Birbhum	1	1982
d) Rudra			
i) (1982: 6)	Birbhum	39	1979-81
ii)(1982: 6)	Birbhum	15	1979-81
e) Bardhan (1988: 503)	Not given	about 500	1972-73

Sources for Table A4.2

Sources	District	No. of villages	Year(s) of survey
I Bose and Bhadoria (1987: 8-9)	Midnapore	766	1986
II Bandopahdyay (1983: 124)	All districts	60	1981/2
III Singharoy (1986: 261)	Midnapore	1	1984
IV Bhatta-charjee (1958: 57)	Birbhum	1	1956
V Bardhan (1988: 425)	Not stated	about 500	1972/73
VI Government of Bengal (1946: 47-8)	All Bengal	77	1944-5
VII Bharati and Bose (1988: 425)	Howrah	1	1980

Appendix 5.1 Samples of questionnaires

Questionnaire 1 - Basic Household Information (completed for all village households)

1. Name of respondent
2. Sex of respondent
3. Age of respondent
4. Father's/husband's name
5. Religion/caste/tribe
6. Relation to household head
7. Occupation of respondent
8. Literate or not

9. Household members
For each household member:
a) Relation to respondent
b) Age
c) Occupation
d) If child, in school or not, and class

10. What fuel is used for cooking? Does this vary seasonally? If gathered, where from? Any gleaning? Any wild foodstuff collected?

11. Any *poussani* given or taken?

12. Any debts given or taken? Where from/to, how much for, and for what reason or purpose?

13. Any help received from the government (e.g. IRDP, loan, tree seedlings)?

14. Land	own	sharecropped	mortgaged	soil type
Dhani				
Dahi				

15. Any *patta* land received?

16. Yearly yield of:	*bighas* grown	*maund* per *bigha*
aman		
boro		
aus		
jute		
other		

17. How many months does home production last for, and how many months is rice bought for? Is any rice sold, and if so when and at what price? Where is it sold? To whom is it sold?

18. Number of livestock	Type of animal	Value of animal

19. Are livestock grazed on own land or is fodder bought? If the latter, give details of price.

20. Other sources of income:

Household member	Type of employment	Income

21. Any assets sold in the last 3-4 years? If so, to whom and why? What price was gained?

22. Any political affiliation. Party member or not?

23. Any other comments or questions?

Questionnaire 2 (completed for 60 poorest households)

1. Hunger, gathering and survival.

1)Does the household glean? How much does it get in an average year? Who goes to glean, when and for how long? Is it possible to glean after a HYV crop? Any restrictions on gleaning?
2)How long do adults/children spend on collecting wood, leaves, dung, or any other burnable material? How much is gathered in a day? Is this seasonal? Is it getting more difficult to gather fuel?
3)How many times do you eat in a day? Do you eat anything not sold in the market, e.g. fish, jute leaves, 'jungle greens', roots or other leaves? (Repeat question 2, substituting 'wild food' for 'fuel').
4)What fills the stomach/takes away hunger most? If you only had two rupees to spend for the day's food, what would you buy?
5)Who decides who eats how much? If there is too little food, who misses out? Who controls the grain store (if there is one)? Who controls the salary from men's/women's children's work? (To women) Does the man spend household income on personal things to the detriment of other members of the family?
6)How much of the household income is spent on food? Do you take ration rice or anything else from the ration shop? If not, why not? Do you spend less on rice/flour and more on other things when more money is available?
7)How much food does the household need a day? What is the amount being eaten at the moment? Does the shortfall of foodstuff (if there is one) vary seasonally?
8)(Asked in Bithigram and Keshipur only) Has there been any recent illness in the household? Who was sick, and what were the actions taken about this?

2. Economic experience

1)Amount of land owned. Where is it? What's growing? Is any land sharecropped or mortgaged in/out? If so, who from/to, and under what system?
2)Has any land been bought/sold in the last five years? If so, why, who from/to? Did you get the right price?
3)What is the average yearly yield in kgs. of paddy/other crops from all land operated?
4)How much of the crop produced is used for consumption and how much sold? When is it sold, and is there a variation in prices?
5)Do you own any livestock? If so, which type, how many, who rears them? *Poussani* (sharereared) or other? If so, who are they borrowed from? Does the household have any livestock on loan? What system operates? Do rich or poor people give *poussani* ? Any other *poussani* given or taken in the last five years?
6)Any debts/loans outstanding? Who from/to? How much for/any interest? Why was loan taken (be specific)?
7)Any other assets owned -trees, jewellery, clothes, anything else (mortgaged or otherwise)?
8)What is the best asset to have in an emergency (give examples)? In emergencies what is the sequence of asset sales? (In Fonogram) In what order would you sell the following five

items - jewellery, chickens, goats, trees or land? (In Bithigram and Keshipur) In what order would you take the following five items - a cycle, a cow, goats, jewellery and cash?
9)Any assets sold in the last two years? If so, why (be specific)? Who to? Was it a good price?
10)Do men/women/children work? Is there more than one occupation? Is the salary fair for the amount of work done? Is work taken outside the village ? What sort of work is required/do you like doing?
11)HYV's: Is there more work after their introduction? Will the rich get richer and the poor poorer because of them? Will marginal farmers be forced to sell their land? Are people satisfied with HYV's? What are the good/bad things about HYVs? Is there any post-harvest processing work available after the *boro* crop?

3. Social experience
1)Why are you poor? Whose fault is it? Is it the fault of rich people? What are poor people like? What are rich people like? What does it mean being poor (in terms of power and self respect)? Has your self respect increased in the last ten years? Which do you value more, food or self respect?
2)Which are the poorest five households in the village?
3)Can you read or write? Do your kids go to school? What do you want for your/their future?
4)Are village people honest? Do they help each other when danger arises?
5)(Asked only in Fonogram) Is there post harvest *zakat* ?

4. Political experience
1)Do the rich help the poor? Do the poor help each other? If so, why? Do rich people cheat poor ones? If so, how? Do poor people cheat each other? If so, how? Why can't poor people get organized like rich ones?
2)What is the condition of the village? Who is in charge? Do you belong to any party/faction?
3)Do the people in charge steal what comes to the village? Does the local Government offer any help to the poorest in hard times (examples)? What is required from the local Government/*panchayat* ? Do you know any Government laws, for example on sharecropping/owning homestead land/minimum wage?
4)If a scheme for rebuilding poor people's houses was started on a co-operative basis, would you join in?
5)Is the Left Front Government doing good work for the poor?
6)Do you want to say anything else, ask any questions?

Appendix 5.2 Land use in Bithigram and Keshipur

A5.2.1 *Danga* land in Bithigram and Keshipur

It was *danga* (or high) land that had for the most part been distributed by the government under its land reform programme. Since 1983, 55 households in Bithigram and 38 households in Keshipur had taken part in a World Bank funded and West Bengal implemented social forestry programme. This has meant large scale planting of eucalyptus on *danga* land in western Midnapore. In Bithigram and Keshipur, participating households planted between 500 and 3000 seedlings per household. This significantly increased the value of *danga* land and its potential product. The differential impact of this programme has followed other rural development schemes in benefitting mainly better off farmers and men, although not to the exclusion of poorer villagers and women. A comprehensive analysis of class and gender aspects of social forestry in Midnapore is given in Nesmith (1990).

A5.2.2 Land operation by income group in Bithigram and Keshipur

The Tables in section 5.4.2 do not show the distribution of *danga* and *sali* land in the Midnapore villages. This is given in Table A5.1. There is a much greater division between these two types of land in the Midnapore villages than there is in Fonogram, where almost all cultivable land can be planted under *aman* paddy.

Table A5.1 Distribution of *danga* and *sali* land in Bithigram and Keshipur by income group, 1988-89

Bithigram

Inc. gr.	% h.holds	% land operated	*Danga* (hectares)*	*Sali* (hectares)*
1	19	8	5.4 (14)	2.1 (4)
2	43	26	15.1 (38)	8.6 (18)
3	16	22	7.5 (19)	10.8 (22)
4	22	44	11.9 (29)	27.3 (56)
Total	100	100	39.9	48.8

Keshipur

Inc gr.	% h.holds	% land operated	*Danga* (hectares)*	*Sali* (hectares)*
1	23	11	4.6 (18)	1.1 (5)
2	25	25	7.2 (27)	4.6 (21)
3	18	19	4.2 (16)	4.8 (22)
4	34	45	10.3 (39)	11.4 (52)
Total	100	100	26.3	21.9

* Figures given in brackets in this column are percentages of the total amount of land in the category.

The Table shows that, in all, 45% of land operated by Bithigram households and 55% of land operated by Keshipur households was *danga* , about half of which was planted under eucalyptus, and half used for growing *aus* or grazing cattle. The amount of *sali* land operated increased from group 1 to group 4 in both villages, and this again shows that the higher income groups have first access to the village resource base. Distribution of *sali* land is particularly skewed in favour of group 4 in Bithigram.

Appendix 5.3 Differentiation of rural households in West Bengal and Bangladesh: evidence from eight studies

What can be learnt from past attempts at ranking and differentiation of households? As was seen in chapter four, the main methods of ranking and categorisation at village level in West Bengal have been by landholding and by class. Landholding is likely to be too imprecise an indicator to enable an analysis of power structures, even though land is the main rural resource. This is because landholding does not take into account land quality or operation, or the access of the household to non-agricultural resources. It also ignores social relations (see B. Harriss 1984: 21-2).

What about class? In the South Asian context it is Marxists and those closely aligned to a Marxist approach who have pursued the issues of ranking and differentiation most diligently, and for that reason their contribution is reviewed here. This is unsurprising given the Marxist heritage in this subject, and the contributions of Engels, Lenin and Mao (for a summary see Byres 1986, who points out the importance of the differentiation debate). No attempt is made here to do anything other than briefly review relevant areas of the differentiation debate, which has continued for over a hundred years (for a discussion of this debate in the 1920's in Russia, see Shanin 1980). It should also be noted that the focus here will be on questions of methodology. Marxists have of course addressed much wider questions than the methodology involved in differentiating rural populations, and classes are for Marxists not separate categories but inter-dependent bodies that historically oppose each other in class struggle. The purpose of classification in much Marxist literature is therefore to understand the nature of class relations. However, it is because this thesis has decided against taking a formal Marxist approach that the focus of this Appendix will be on methodology.

Marxists have been concerned mainly with what they call the 'means of production' (such as land or cattle), and 'relations of production' and exploitation, which concern who works manually, who hires-in or hires-out labour, credit relations and the operation of the market, and more recently, intra-household relations. However, there does not seem to be a definitive model for analysis of differentiation which connects the two forms of production, and includes areas such as the appropriation of surplus, market relations, and household mobility. This is not surprising, given the complexity of the matter (on which see Rudra 1988; J. Harriss 1982: 134, 208). As Harriss has put it (ibid.: 294):

> No social reality can be monopolized and neatly divided into one deductively chosen type of analysis with every conclusion derived from it. Reality is not neat, now can relevant analysis of it ever be.

Approaches to differentiation in village studies in Bangladesh and West Bengal have tended to be somewhat idiosyncratic and in cases confused, and eight examples are given below. Siddiqui (1981: 235-6) for his Bangladesh village gives seven categories of households based on land holdings, later conflated to poor, middle and rich peasants. Similarly Rahman (1986: 102-3) gives nine categories of landholding for his two Bangladesh villages, and then goes on to discuss social relations in the villages in terms of class. Neither of these studies make it clear why they initially use particular categories of land holding.

Bose (1985 51-2; 1984: 31-6), on the other hand, for his West Bengal villages, first decides to use a Maoist definition of class and then relates this to land ownership. This is therefore an imposition of typology onto data. Alternatively Van Schendel (1981: 85), and Arens and Van Beurden (1977: 77-88) for their Bangladesh villages, and Bose and Bhadoria (1987: 109) for their West Bengal villages, differentiate on the basis of indigenous categories of class. Their method of differentiation depends on either those categories people themselves use (in Van Schendel by description of the months home production will last for, and in Bose and Bhadoria in terms of villagers' ideas about occupation); or on classes formed on the basis of a combination of the researchers' and villagers' views in the case of Arens and Van Beurden, where these classes are then superimposed onto productive resources.

Alternatively, Barhdan at macro level for all West Bengal uses three classes (1988: 503-5), conflating an original Leninist-Maoist grouping of five, but without explaining how poor peasants and landless labourers make one class in this analysis. Rudra (1988: 489) on the other hand claims that Lenin's and Mao's categories are 'inapplicable' to India, and gives two classes, big landowners and agricultural labourers (ibid. 492-6), consigning those outside of these two classes to a state of 'no-classness'. This division into two categories of 'poor' and 'rich' corresponds to the perceptions of poorest people in the study villages (on which, see chapter seven).

All of the above authors who have used class as a means of differentiation also discuss exploitation in terms of the hiring-in and hiring-out of labour, and participation in manual labour. In this they follow Marxist theory as to the nature of rich, middle and poor peasants, and landless labourers (for an overview see Byres 1986. And see for example Bose 1985: 51-2; Arens and Van Beurden 1977: 79-80). Patnaik's 'E' or exploitation ratio (Patnaik 1988), which 'measures' the ratio of hired-in to household labour (including labour on hired-in or hired-out land), has developed this theory. Patnaik's method may not have as much relevance for differentiating households in West Bengal as for other parts of

India, given that there is some evidence of substantial hiring-in of labour by 'poor' peasants in West Bengal (see Rudra and Mukhopadhya 1976), a mass of smallholders and a high percentage of village land held by absentee landlords. Patnaik's method also concentrates on only one aspect of exploitation, and ignores other forms of 'exploitation' - such as that of women by men - that are crucial to the understanding of village society, as she herself recognizes. As Rudra has noted (1988: 489):

> It is this fundamental difference between the factors that drive a peasant to hire labourers under Indian conditions and those that were known to Lenin and Mao-tse-tung that, in my opinion, makes their labor-based criterion inapplicable to our own agricultural society.[1]

As this Appendix illustrates, Marxists have not agreed on a model for the differentiation of rural households which could be used in this thesis.

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[1]For an historical analysis of Patnaik's work, see Shanin (1980).

Appendix 5.4 The relation between income group, caste and tribe, Bithigram and Keshipur, 1988-89

Not shown in the discussion of income groups in section 5.4.2 is the relation between income group, caste and tribe in the Midnapore villages. This is given in Table A5.2.

Table A5.2 Numbers of castes and tribes in Bithigram and Keshipur, by income group, 1988-89

Income group	Bithigram households	Keshipur households
1	14 Lodhas 1 *Narpit* (a) 3 Mahatos	7 Challuks 6 Mahatos
2	20 Lodhas 2 Narpit 20 Mahatos	7 Challuks 7 Mahatos
3	2 Lodhas 14 Mahatos	2 Challuks 8 Mahatos
4	21 Mahatos	4 Challuks 16 Mahatos

(a) *Narpit* is the barber caste.

It is evident from the Table that Mahatos preponderate absolutely, and relative to total numbers, in income groups 3 and 4 in both villages, and that there are more Lodhas and Challucks in income groups one and two. That there are only two Lodhas in group 3, and none in group 4, and three Mahatos (two of these being elderly widows) in group 1 in Bithigram shows a clear connection between caste and control of village resources. The Table also shows that there are differences in income among the Challuck and Lodha castes, more particularly in the case of the former.

Appendix 5.5 Ranking of households in the three study villages, and method of income calculation

Appendix 5.5a-c (pages 250-258) gives households ranked by income in the three study villages. This is followed by an explanation of the method used in income calculation, and Figures A5.1-3 (pages 263-265), which show income distribution in graph form in the three study villages.

Appendix 5.5a

Fonogram

1	in 2	lo 3	lop 3a	pocc 4	socc 5	prod 6	hh 7	dr 8
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.0	0
2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2.0	0
3	424	0	9	1	0	0	5.3	4.3
4	437	0	0	7	0	0	3.6	2.6
5	493	12	0	1	0	0	4.3	3.3
6	498	0	0	1	0	0	6.0	5.0
7	520	0	0	23	0	0	5.0	4.0
8	521	0	0	5	0	0	4.6	3.6
9	536	0	0	1	0	0	4.6	6.6
10	560	0	0	7	0	0	3.3	2.3
11	570	0	0	5	1	0	5.0	4.0
12	575	10	0	1	0	0	4.0	2.0
13	576	0	0	1	0	0	4.0	3.0
14	611	0	0	5	1	0	3.6	2.6
15	612	0	0	1	0	0	4.3	3.3
16	630	0	0	1	5	0	5.0	2.3
17	645	0	53	1	0	0	4.0	3.0
18	647	0	50	1	0	0	3.6	2.6
19	662	0	0	1	7	0	3.6	2.6
20	675	0	0	22	0	0	4.0	3.0
21	678	0	0	10	0	0	2.0	0
22	679	0	22	1	0	3.0	3.6	3.6
23	688	9	19	6	0	0	3.6	2.6
24	700	0	0	1	0	0	3.0	2.0
25	728	0	0	1	0	0	7.0	2.5
26	730	0	0	7	0	0	1.3	.3
27	732	36	0	1	0	2.0	7.3	6.3
28	736	2	0	1	0	0	3.3	.6
29	736	0	34	6	1	0	4.0	3.0
30	739	9	0	1	0	0	4.0	1.5
31	740	15	0	1	0	0	5.0	1.5
32	750	0	0	1	0	0	2.0	1.0
33	752	8	0	20	0	0	5.0	4.0
34	753	33	33	2	1	3.0	7.0	6.0
35	757	0	0	6	0	0	3.3	2.3
36	758	33	0	1	2	3.0	7.0	2.5
37	760	0	0	1	0	0	5.6	1.8
38	766	34	40	1	0	0	3.0	2.0
39	767	0	0	7	0	0	3.0	2.0
40	776	0	0	1	0	0	3.3	2.3
41	783	18	8	1	0	0	3.0	.5
42	790	36	39	1	0	0	3.0	1.5
43	792	75	11	1	2	0	6.6	2.3

	in	lo	lop	pocc	socc	prod	hh	dr
44	796	30	0	2	0	8.0	1.0	0
45	801	0	0	1	0	0	3.3	2.3
46	824	0	0	5	0	0	3.3	2.3
47	843	4	67	1	7	0	4.0	1.0
48	875	0	0	5	0	0	2.0	1.0
49	883	0	97	1	5	2.5	6.0	5.0
50	890	57	0	1	0	3.0	7.0	2.5
51	893	0	0	6	0	0	3.3	2.3
52	900	0	0	1	0	0	4.0	3.0
53	900	0	0	1	0	0	3.0	2.3
54	907	8	53	1	0	0	3.0	2.0
55	930	0	25	1	0	0	3.6	2.6
56	930	44	0	1	2	1.0	5.0	4.0
57	931	0	0	1	0	0	3.0	.1
58	955	0	0	22	0	0	6.0	1.0
59	983	54	185	1	2	4.0	7.3	2.6
60	986	0	0	22	0	0	3.6	2.6
61	990	0	8	1	0	0	7.3	1.4
62	996	0	0	1	0	0	3.0	2.0
63	1000	0	0	1	0	0	2.3	2.3
64	1017	0	0	5	1	0	3.0	2.0
65	1019	0	0	22	0	0	2.6	2.6
66	1025	0	0	1	0	0	4.0	2.0
67	1033	96	72	2	0	0	3.0	2.0
68	1045	0	0	1	0	0	4.0	3.0
69	1046	0	31	1	0	0	4.3	3.3
70	1095	10	19	1	0	6.0	3.6	.8
71	1110	133	0	2	0	0	5.0	4.0
72	1110	6	0	5	1	0	3.0	2.0
73	1125	63	33	1	2	4.0	4.0	3.0
74	1130	0	0	1	0	0	2.3	1.3
75	1162	21	0	11	0	0	4.3	3.3
76	1164	55	150	1	2	2.0	5.0	1.5
77	1173	0	0	1	0	0	2.3	1.3
78	1221	7	0	1	0	.5	4.3	1.1
79	1263	0	0	1	0	0	2.6	1.6
80	1282	0	0	9	0	0	2.3	1.3
81	1283	4	107	22	0	0	3.0	2.0
82	1301	78	0	1	2	1.0	5.3	1.1
83	1333	0	0	12	0	0	3.0	2.0
84	1342	148	0	1	2	5.0	6.0	2.0
85	1351	47	12	1	2	4.0	4.3	3.3
86	1356	68	0	5	0	0	10.3	1.1

	in	lo	lop	pocc	socc	prod	hh	dr
87	1356	66	0	1	0	3.0	4.3	1.6
88	1360	51	16	2	1	1.5	4.0	3.0
89	1388	0	0	9	0	0	3.6	2.6
90	1391	0	28	1	0	0	2.3	2.3
91	1395	0	121	1	0	5.0	4.6	1.3
92	1405	112	86	1	2	5.5	9.0	3.5
93	1415	149	0	2	0	6.0	5.3	4.3
94	1430	215	14	2	0	6.0	4.3	3.3
95	1437	19	0	6	1	0	3.6	3.0
96	1437	197	0	2	2	6.0	4.0	2.6
97	1460	0	0	1	2	0	5.0	1.7
98	1472	51	29	1	0	6.0	3.6	.8
99	1484	127	58	2	0	3.0	3.6	2.8
100	1489	12	0	1	0	0	2.3	1.3
101	1500	0	0	1	2	0	3.6	.2
102	1535	8	153	6	0	0	3.0	2.0
103	1586	0	89	1	0	2.0	9.0	1.2
104	1627	0	0	7	2	0	4.3	3.3
105	1630	192	0	1	0	3.0	7.3	1.4
106	1656	0	0	13	0	0	4.3	1.1
107	1666	130	0	2	0	3.0	6.3	2.1
108	1708	0	91	5	0	1.0	2.6	1.6
109	1716	206	0	2	0	1.0	6.0	2.0
110	1720	78	0	12	1	12.0	5.0	1.5
111	1725	0	0	5	6	0	2.0	1.0
112	1743	326	100	2	0	0	9.6	2.2
113	1771	0	0	6	1	9.0	2.3	1.3
114	1807	116	170	2	0	0	7.0	2.5
115	1813	90	6	2	0	7.5	7.3	1.4
116	1826	0	0	5	0	4.0	2.3	1.0
117	1834	495	0	2	0	0	8.6	3.3
118	1854	253	0	2	0	9.0	6.0	1.0
119	1904	139	4	2	0	6.5	5.6	4.6
120	1910	126	4	2	0	8.0	5.3	1.6
121	1920	58	0	2	0	6.5	5.0	2.0
122	1970	131	0	1	0	3.0	3.0	1.5
123	2037	35	0	5	0	2.0	4.0	1.0
124	2066	152	0	2	0	12.0	3.0	2.0
125	2087	31	105	1	0	2.5	4.0	1.0
126	2156	200	0	2	6	0	4.0	3.0
127	2231	574	0	2	9	6.0	18.0	2.6
128	2300	50	16	6	2	0	2.0	1.0
129	2467	223	81	2	0	12.0	4.6	3.6

	in	lo	lop	pocc	socc	prod	hh	dr
130	2526	126	0	2	0	12.0	2.6	1.6
131	2587	576	0	2	0	12.0	9.0	2.0
132	2626	299	0	2	0	6.0	6.0	2.0
133	2733	126	196	2	0	6.0	3.6	2.6
134	2830	525	18	2	0	6.0	9.6	2.2
135	2850	278	0	2	0	6.0	4.0	3.0
136	3065	111	12	6	2	6.0	4.6	.5
137	3100	184	27	2	24	6.0	3.0	2.0
138	3400	197	0	2	0	12.0	2.0	1.0
139	3656	546	0	2	11	12.0	8.3	1.8
140	4485	476	107	11	0	6.0	11.0	2.7
141	4722	260	0	2	11	12.0	3.6	2.6

	in	lo	pocc	socc	prod	hh	dr
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	0	31	8	0	0	1.0	0
2	671	310	2	1	6.0	7.3	2.6
3	676	15	1	0	0	1.3	.3
4	700	123	4	1	2.0	4.0	3.0
5	713	248	1	0	4.0	5.5	1.6
6	720	163	1	0	0	4.0	1.0
7	724	30	1	0	3.0	5.6	1.8
8	734	0	1	0	0	1.6	.6
9	750	124	4	0	4.0	2.0	1.0
10	788	151	1	0	2.0	5.3	1.6
11	798	46	1	0	2.0	4.0	1.0
12	800	31	1	0	0	3.6	.8
13	810	15	1	0	1.0	4.0	1.0
14	811	300	2	4	6.0	5.3	1.6
15	819	71	1	4	2.0	2.6	1.6
16	853	31	1	0	0	3.0	.5
17	866	90	1	0	2.0	3.0	.5
18	899	62	1	0	6.0	2.0	0
19	900	108	1	0	2.0	4.0	.3
20	918	161	4	0	4.0	6.6	.6
21	930	56	1	0	0	3.3	.6
22	931	93	14	0	5.0	2.0	0
23	948	15	1	21	2.5	4.3	.4
24	976	400	2	0	7.0	4.3	.4
25	983	132	2	4	6.5	3.3	2.3
26	990	0	1	0	0	2.0	1.0
27	990	48	1	0	6.0	2.0	1.0
28	995	115	4	0	2.0	4.0	1.0
29	997	15	4	1	2.0	4.0	.3
30	1022	122	1	0	2.0	5.3	.3
31	1025	115	1	0	3.0	7.0	.8
32	1032	186	1	0	0	7.0	.2
33	1045	62	2	0	10.0	4.0	.3
34	1046	93	1	0	2.0	4.3	.1
35	1052	328	1	2	8.0	5.0	.6
36	1060	31	1	0	0	2.0	0
37	1074	120	1	0	2.5	4.3	.4
38	1085	142	1	0	1.0	9.6	.9
39	1093	15	1	0	3.0	4.0	1.0
40	1097	28	1	0	4.5	4.0	1.0
41	1104	315	1	0	2.0	5.0	0
42	1121	341	2	1	4.0	9.0	1.3
43	1130	201	1	0	4.0	3.0	0

Appendix 5.5b

Bithigram

	in	lo	pocc	socc	prod	hh	dr
44	1133	139	1	0	3.0	3.6	5.0
45	1141	93	6	0	6.0	3.3	2.3
46	1169	15	1	4	4.0	3.3	.6
47	1173	341	2	0	10.0	10.6	2.5
48	1180	512	1	22	4.0	3.3	.1
49	1183	15	1	0	5.0	3.0	2.0
50	1193	15	1	0	2.0	3.3	2.3
51	1207	231	1	0	4.5	8.3	1.1
52	1230	186	4	0	0	4.0	0
53	1276	62	1	0	0	1.3	.3
54	1333	124	1	0	8.0	3.0	2.0
55	1333	30	2	0	8.0	3.0	.5
56	1338	186	2	0	4.5	8.3	1.8
57	1365	105	20	0	0	2.3	1.3
58	1375	220	2	1	6.0	3.3	2.3
59	1384	200	1	0	7.0	4.6	1.3
60	1393	154	2	0	8.0	3.0	2.0
61	1450	170	4	1	4.0	6.0	.2
62	1536	68	20	0	2.5	2.0	1.0
63	1573	862	2	0	12.0	9.3	3.7
64	1660	341	15	2	0	5.0	.7
65	1677	129	1	0	9.0	2.0	1.0
66	1750	224	3	0	8.0	5.0	.6
67	1784	255	2	1	9.0	5.0	.6
68	1800	496	2	0	12.0	3.0	2.0
69	1801	248	2	0	10.0	3.6	2.6
70	1870	217	2	17	7.5	3.0	.5
71	1916	254	16	0	6.0	3.0	2.0
72	1933	386	2	0	12.0	4.3	3.3
73	1937	362	3	0	8.0	5.3	1.6
74	1962	403	3	0	6.0	8.0	2.0
75	1969	100	3	0	0	6.6	5.6
76	1980	15	1	0	0	1.0	0
77	2005	930	2	9	12.0	10.0	4.0
78	2017	131	1	0	4.0	3.0	0
79	2060	348	2	9	12.0	3.0	2.0
80	2163	323	2	0	6.0	2.0	1.0
81	2164	248	3	0	6.0	5.0	.7
82	2234	85	20	0	3.0	2.6	.3
83	2243	49	17	0	3.0	2.3	2.3
84	2290	131	1	0	8.0	2.0	0
85	2436	132	3	0	0	6.6	2.6
86	2480	300	3	0	12.0	5.0	.6

	in	lo	pocc	socc	prod	hh	dr
87	2536	500	3	0	9.0	7.0	2.5
88	2558	534	3	2	12.0	7.0	.8
89	2660	496	3	2	6.5	5.6	.4
90	2853	124	3	0	6.0	5.0	.6
91	2868	1236	2	0	12.0	8.3	1.8
92	2918	1236	2	0	12.0	8.0	1.6
93	3113	186	3	0	12.0	5.3	4.3
94	3235	744	3	0	8.5	4.3	3.3
95	3452	211	3	0	12.0	6.3	4.3
96	3725	1100	3	0	5.0	4.0	1.0
97	6577	1100	2	0	12.0	3.6	2.6

Keshipur

Appendix 5.5c

	in	lo	pocc	socc	prod	hh	dr
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	600	213	1	0	9.0	1.0	0
2	603	124	1	0	.5	2.6	.3
3	662	186	1	0	2.0	4.0	1.0
4	686	124	1	4	2.0	6.0	.5
5	692	0	1	0	0	1.3	.3
6	700	0	1	0	0	1.0	0
7	710	186	1	0	4.0	1.0	0
8	768	53	4	1	1.0	6.3	1.1
9	768	38	1	0	0	5.0	.2
10	853	15	1	4	0	2.6	.3
11	869	62	4	0	3.0	2.3	1.3
12	873	93	4	1	7.0	3.0	.5
13	894	314	2	0	0	8.0	1.7
14	900	62	4	1	0	3.0	0
15	904	310	1	0	.5	9.3	.5
16	947	100	1	2	8.0	4.0	1.5
17	992	193	2	0	8.0	7.6	2.8
18	1100	93	5	0	0	2.0	0
19	1113	162	2	0	8.0	3.0	2.0
20	1131	610	2	4	10.0	13.0	1.6
21	1150	62	1	4	1.0	3.0	.5
22	1165	434	1	0	6.0	7.0	1.3
23	1186	100	1	0	0	7.3	.2
24	1247	100	1	4	1.0	7.3	.8
25	1321	496	2	0	6.0	3.3	2.3
26	1330	0	4	0	0	2.6	1.6
27	1372	200	2	4	4.0	3.3	.6
28	1400	62	4	0	1.0	1.0	0
29	1455	126	4	0	6.5	29.0	0
30	1490	145	2	0	7.0	2.0	0
31	1494	93	3	0	4.0	5.3	4.3
32	1603	155	4	0	6.5	2.6	.3
33	1631	906	2	0	11.0	12.3	3.1
34	1823	177	1	0	3.5	2.6	.5
35	1867	186	3	0	3.5	5.6	1.8
36	1905	218	3	0	0	7.6	1.5
37	1955	248	3	0	6.5	7.0	.8
38	2036	434	3	0	6.0	8.3	1.8
39	2125	0	3	0	0	4.0	3.0
40	2148	650	2	3	7.5	9.0	1.2
41	2250	400	3	2	8.5	6.0	.5
42	2260	62	2	0	6.0	1.0	0
43	2266	279	3	0	9.0	3.0	.3
44	2401	62	3	0	1.0	6.6	1.2
45	2500	310	3	0	6.0	4.0	0
46	2653	124	3	0	1.0	5.6	.4
47	2717	155	3	0	6.5	4.6	3.6
48	2727	62	3	0	2.0	3.6	.8
49	2750	248	3	0	7.0	3.6	2.6

	in	lo	pocc	socc	prod	hh	dr
50	2811	124	3	0	2.5	3.6	3.6
51	2950	280	3	0	6.0	4.0	3.0
52	3200	93	3	0	0	3.0	2.0
53	3307	186	3	0	0	3.0	2.0
54	3380	372	3	0	8.0	5.0	1.5
55	3581	279	3	0	6.0	4.3	3.3
56	5133	620	19	2	12.0	6.0	1.0
57	5600	610	3	0	6.0	2.0	0

Key to Appendix 5.5a - 5.5c

In	=	Annual income per consumption unit (in rupees)
Lo	=	Land owned (in decimals)
Lop	=	Land operated (in decimals)
Pocc	=	Primary occupation
Socc	=	Secondary occupation
Prod	=	Number of months respondents estimated home production would last for
Hh	=	Number of consumption units in the household
Dr	=	Dependency ratio

Explanation:

Column 1
This column shows the income group number of individual households.
Column 2 - income
The figures in this column are for total annual income per household per consumption unit. Consumption units were estimated following Scott (1985). An adult (over 12) was taken as one consumption unit, a child under six as one third and a child between six and twelve as two thirds of a consumption unit.

Total annual income here means income from land owned or operated, all sources of employment within and outside the village, from cattle, and loss or gain of income involved with credit.

As Townsend (1970) has remarked, estimates of income by respondents in social science surveys are likely to be under-estimates. However, as most respondents were considered likely to under-estimate in a similar fashion, and the main interest here was in relative rather than absolute incomes, the probable under-estimation of income by respondents does not substantially affect the analysis.

The figures in the tables above represent a static picture for one, average year. They do not take into account loss of value of assets or repayment of capital from debts. Following is a description of the method by which income was calculated.

Income from land
Calculation of income from land owned was based on yields given by respondents for all land owned over the whole of an average year. A similar calculation was made for land hired in or out, taking into account the specific terms under which the land was operated. Residues from crops were also taken into account.

Detailed estimates for profits from operation of land in the *boro* season in Fonogram can be found in chapter six; the average profit for farming one *bigha* of land in the *boro* season under paddy was 812 rupees, and this figure varied according to yield of individual plots. Similar calculations were made for profits for other crops as the one in chapter six. For example, average figures for farming one bigha of *aman* paddy in the Midnapore villages is given below:

Item:	Cost (in rupees)
Ploughing costs	140
Sowing costs	120
Fertilizer	80
Pesticide	25
Hire of cart	20
Harvesting	95
Tying	24
Carrying	35
Threshing	30
Milling	27
Total	596

Average yields for this season were 12 *maunds* of paddy or 320 kgs. of milled rice a *bigha*. At 3.25 rupees a kg., yield/profit is equal to 1040 rupees, to which can be added 360 rupees for straw, making a total of 1400 rupees.
Subtracting costs from this figure gives an overall profit of 804 rupees per *bigha* .

Income from employment
Income from labour was calculated using figures given by respondents for amount earnt per day and number of months worked during the year. For example, in Fonogram a common answer was that agricultural labourers earnt, on average, over a year, 15 rupees for a full days work for 180 days of the year. Yearly income from labour was therefore equal to 2,700 rupees. Children earnt 8 rupees for a full days work. In the Midnapore villages male agricultural labourers' wages were lower, on average at about 10-12 rupees per day for a full days work.

Contract labouring, involving rock digging and breaking, was carried out on a piece rate basis. Generally, labourers earnt 70 rupees a week and worked for 26 weeks a year, making a total yearly income of 1,820 rupees.

The various other sources of income were estimated in a similar fashion dependent on respondents' replies.

Income from cattle
In Fonogram profit from ownership of plough cows or bullocks was based on rental or self use of a pair of animals for 80 days a year at 25 rupees a day. Foodstuff for the animals (other than free grazing) was estimated at 400 rupees for a year. Profit from a pair of plough cows was therefore calculated at 1,600 rupees a year (25 multiplied by 80, minus 400).

Profit from milk cows in Fonogram was estimated at production of 15 rupees of milk a week for 32 weeks of the year, or 480 rupees a year. This is an average figure and probably the least accurate of calculations, as respondents were not asked milk yields for individual cows (see Seabright 1987 on the profitability of milk cows).

A similar analysis for the profitability of livestock was made in the Midnapore villages. Plough animals were estimated to be worth 500 rupees each (given the lower hiring rate of 20 rupees a day and nature of cropping in the locality). Milk animals gave a profit of 300 rupees a year (given lower milk yields than in Fonogram).

Income or loss of income from credit and debt
The main source of credit in Fonogram was the local shopkeepers, most of whom lived in Fonogram. They did not charge interest on loans, but rather charged a higher rate for goods bought on credit than for those bought for cash. Interest rates of about 10% were being charged for items bought on credit, which was the normal mode of purchase, particularly

for poorer households. Interest rates were therefore calculated at 10% a year, and 10% of any amount outstanding was subtracted from the total income of the household. Similarly, 10% of any outstanding credit was added to the total household income.

A similar system operated in the Midnapore villages, and similar calculations were made. It was not possible to take into account in calculating debt in Bithigram and Keshipur the *dadan* system described in chapter five, whereby loans were repaid through labour charged at below the 'market' rate.

An example of the calculation of household income is given below for household 134, a middle farming household from Fonogram in income group 4. This example is used to show the method of calculation rather than to show income of an 'average' household.

Income of household 134, Fonogram	Rupees
12 *bighas* of *aman* @ 7.5 *maunds* of milled rice per *bigha* = 90 *maunds* x 140 rupees per *maund* + 1920 (straw) - Rs 7, 800 (cultivation costs).	6720
6 *bighas* of *boro* @ 15 *maunds* of milled rice per *bigha* = 9O *maunds* x Rs. 140 per *maund* + 600 (straw) - Rs 6, 648 (cultivation costs)	6552
5 *bighas* of vegetables	4125
Sale of vegetables at market	1275
2 plough cows	1600
3 milk cows	1500
Income from employment of two agricultural labourers	5400
Total	27172
+/- debt	0

Number of consumption units in the household is 9.6. Therefore yearly income per consumption unit is 27, 172 divided by 9.6, or 2, 83O.

Columns 3 and 3a - land owned and land operated

Column 3 shows land owned by the household. Column 3a shows land operated, i.e. land sharecropped or mortgaged in plus land owned. As little land was mortgaged or sharecropped in the Midnapore villages, details have not been included in this Appendix.

Column 4 - primary occupation

This shows the primary occupation of the household.
The key for this and column 5, which is for secondary occupation, is as follows

1 = Agricultural labourer
2 = Farmer
3 = Railway worker
4 = Contract labourer
5 = Labourer on lorry
6 = Petty trader
7 = Factory worker
8 = Charity
9 = Shopkeeper
13 = Unknown
14 = Shop assistant
15 = Service
16 = Guard
17 = Homeguard
18 = Sale of bamboo
19 = Teacher
20 = Mason's labour
21 = Cowherder

10 = Maid servant
11 = Business
12 = Lorry driver
22 = Van driver
23 = Tied labourer
24 = *Imam*

Primary occupation here is the occupation by which all household members earnt their main source of income for the household taken as whole, rather than the occupation of the 'head' of household. For example, if the 'head' of household was a shopkeeper and earnt Rs. 3,000 a year from this, and two other household members were agricultural labourers and earnt between them Rs. 3, 100 a year, then 'agricultural labour' was taken as the primary source of income.

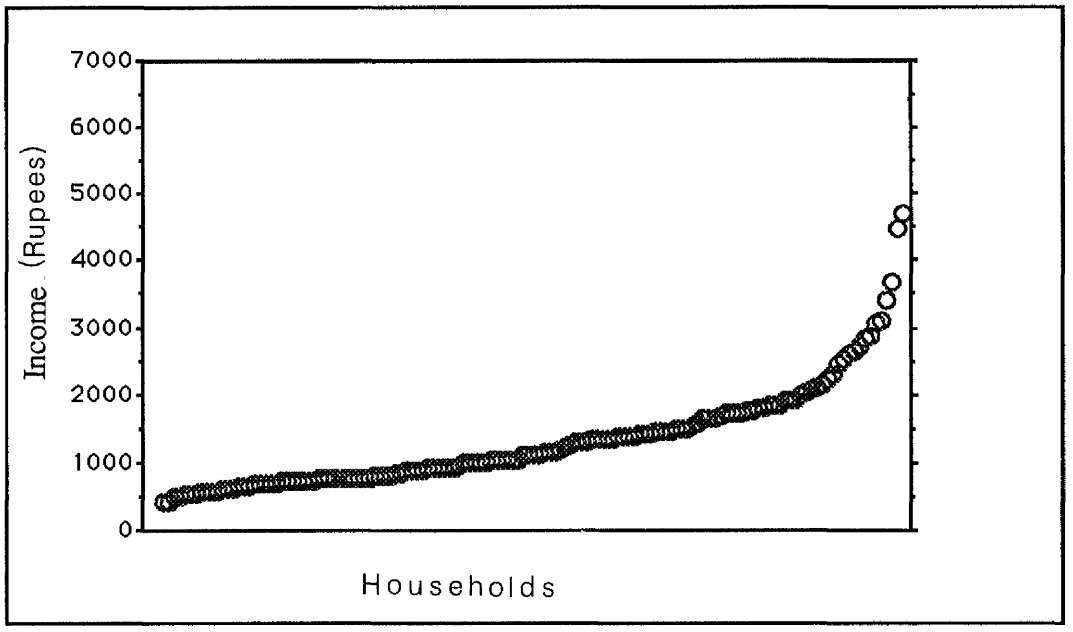
Secondary occupation has been calculated in the following manner. If a household earned between 33% and 49% of its income from a single source of employment other than its primary occupation, this was counted as secondary income. For example, if the total annual income of a household was 9,000 rupees, and 5,000 rupees was earnt by agricultural labour and 4,000 rupees earnt from farming, the primary source occupation of the household was taken as agricultural labour, and the secondary occupation as farming. Any income from the same source of employment under 33% of total household income has not been included in column 5, although it has been included in the general calculation of income.

Column 6 - home production
This column shows the number of months which respondents estimated household production of crops would last for in an average year. Figures such as 5.0E-1 should be taken as a decimal, i.e. 0.5 months.

Column 7 - household members
This column shows the number of consumption units in the household. See under 'Income' above for a explanation of how this was calculated. Figures such as 5.0E-1 should be taken as a decimal, i.e. 0.5.

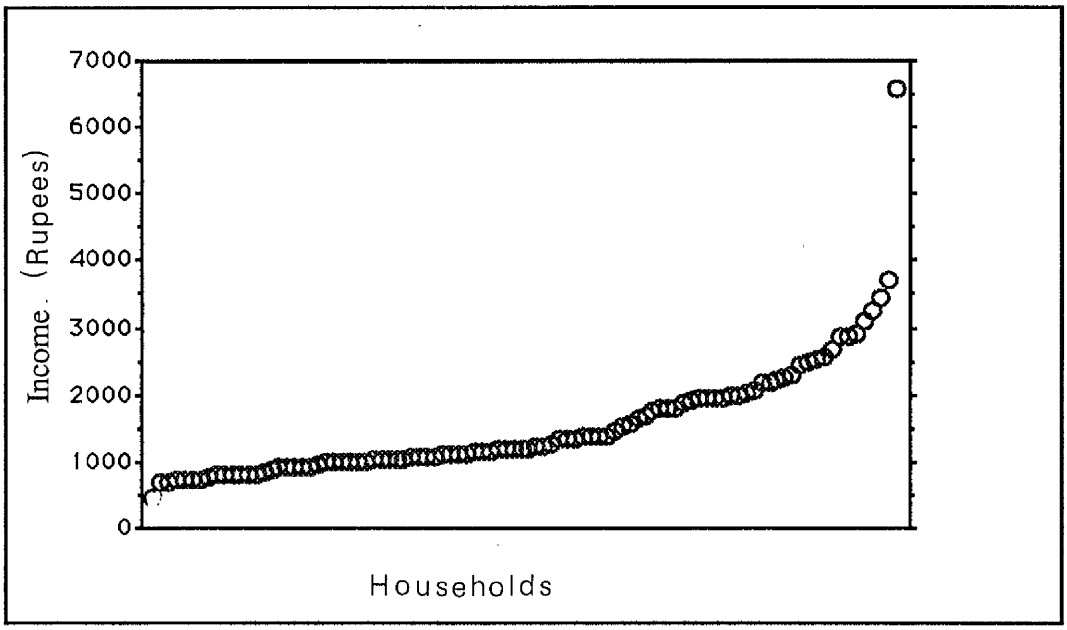
Column 8 - dependency ratios
This column shows the dependency ratio for households, which is calculated as the number of workers aged over 12 working for more than three months in a year, divided by all other household members. Figures such as 3.0E-1 should be taken as a decimal, i.e. 0.3.

Figure 5 5a



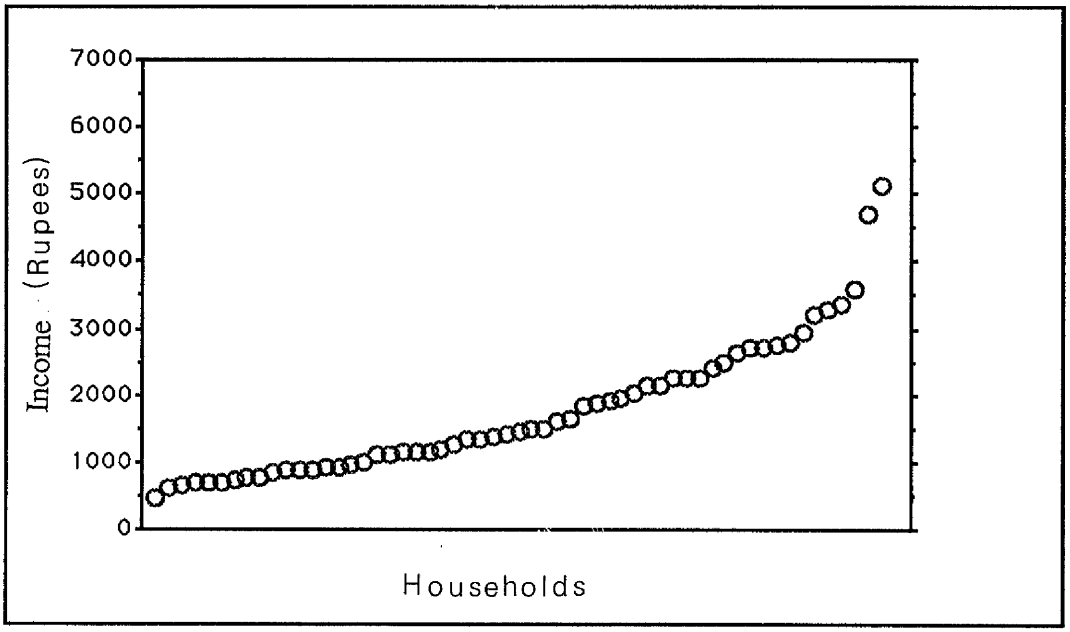
Income distribution in Fonogram, 1988-89

Figure 5.5b



Income distribution in Bithigram, 1988-89

Figure 5.5c



Income distribution in Keshipur, 1988-89

Appendix 5.6 Household occupation by primary source of income for the three study villages, by income group (1)

Income group	Fonogram		Bithigram		Keshipur	
1	al	31 (61)	al	13 (72)	al	8 (63)
	l	5 (9)	cl	2 (11)	cl	3 (23)
	fa	4 (8)	f	2 (11)	f	1 (7)
	t	4 (8)	c	1 (6)	b	1 (7)
	f	2 (4)	Total	18 (100)	Total	13 (100)
	c	2 (4)				
	m	1 (2)				
	v	1 (2)				
	ms	1 (2)				
	Total	51 (100)				
2	al	26 (65)	al	26 (63)	al	6 (43)
	v	4 (10)	f	9 (21)	f	5 (36)
	l	3 (8)	r	4 (10)	cl	2 (14)
	f	3 (8)	sa	1 (2)	l	1 (7)
	s	2 (5)	ml	1 (2)	Total	14 (100)
	b	1 (2)	t	1 (2)		
	ld	1 (2)	Total	42 (100)		
	Total	40 (100)				
3	f	14 (45)	f	6 (38)	r	4 (40)
	al	8 (26)	r	4 (25)	f	2 (20)
	t	3 (10)	al	2 (13)	cl	3 (30)
	l	3 (10)	cl	1 (6)	al	1 (10)
	fa	1 (3)	se	1 (6)	Total	10 (100)
	ld	1 (3)	g	1 (6)		
	?	1 (3)	ml	1 (6)		
	Total	31 (100)	Total	16 (100)		
4	f	14 (74)	r	11 (52)	r	17 (85)
	t	2 (11)	f	6 (30)	f	2 (10)
	l	1 (5)	al	2 (10)	t	1 (5)
	al	1 (5)	ml	1 (4)	Total	20 (100)
	b	1 (5)	hg	1 (4)		
	Total	19 (100)	Total	21 (100)		

(1) Rounded figures in brackets are percentages for each income group.

Key:

al = agricultural labour
l = labourers on lorry
t = petty trader
f = factory work
c = charity
m = mason
ml = mason's labour
v = van driver
ms = maid servant
s = shopkeeper
b = business
ld = lorry driver
f = farmer
cl = contract labour
sa = shop assistant
r = railway
se = 'service'
g = guard
hg = homeguard
b = bamboo
? = unknown

Appendix 6.1
Supporting documents concerning the Fonogram irrigation scheme

[Note: these documents were supplied by the Stuttgart office of Bread for the World, a non governmental organisation which provided part funding for the Fonogram irrigation scheme. Any comments or marks on the two following documents are those of either the staff at the Rural Development Consortium or Bread for the World.]

Appendix 6.1a (pages 268-281)

Letter from the Rural Development Consortium, Calcutta, to Bread for the World, Stuttgart

Pilot project for irrigation scheme

RURAL DEVELOPMENT CONSORTIUM

(Registered under the West Bengal Socieiets Registration Act. 1961—Registration No. S\17692 of 1976-77)

(R D C)

No - 495/RDC/80

sicent : Pannalal Dasgupta
neral Secretary : Shiba Sankar Chakrabarty

Eingegangen
25. NOV. 1980

46-B, ARABINDA SARANI,
CALCUTTA-700 005
[redacted]
Phone : 55 6995

From : R. N. Sen Gupta
Director

November 13, 1980

Dear Mr. Kruse,

A project proposal involving a total cost of Rs. 18.75 lakhs for assisting landless labourers and marginal farmers of eight villages in Barasat P.S. of 24-Parganas district was placed in the last meeting of the RDC Executive Committee for consideration.

The Executive Committee after due consideration of the proposal decided that only the Pilot phase of the proposal involving a cost not exceeding Rs. 1.20 lakhs be recommended to BFW for approval and sanction of funds.

Accordingly, a copy of the project viz."Area Development Project for assisting landless labourers and marginal farmers of eight villages of Gothita, Amradanga, Chandanhati, Kathore, Badu, Bishnupur, Nalkura and Maheswarpur of Barasat P.S. District 24-Parganas" containing the Pilot phase of the programme only is sent herewith for your consideration. The Pilot phase will involve a cost of Rs. 1,17,810/- only.

If approved, the fund may be made available to the Project-holder - Udayan Samaj Kalyan Samity, P.O. : Badu, District - 24-Parganas, West Bengal, India.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

(R. N. Sen Gupta)

Mr. Rainer Kruse
Asia Desk/India
Bread for the World
West Germany

P I L O T P R O J E C T

1. Name of the Project : Area Development Project for assisting landless labourers and marginal farmers of eight villages of Gotitha, Amradanga, Chandanhati, Kathoro, Badu, Bishnupur, Nalkuara & Maheswarpur of Barasat P.S., Dist. : 24-Parganas.

2. Project Holder with short description of its activities : Sponsored by the Tagore Socity for Rural Development

i) The Project holder is Udayan Samaj Kalyan Samity, P.O. : Badu, P.S. : Barasat, West Bengal with headquarters at Badu - the sponsoring agency being the Tagore Society for Rural Development.

Udayan Samaj Kalyan Samity is a voluntary organisation registered under the Registration of Societies Act formed by the inhabitants of eight villages (Mouzas) of Gotitha, Amradanga, Maheswarpur, Badu, Kathora, Chandanhati, Nalkuara and Bishnupur of P.S. Baradat with the object of improving the economic condition of the weaker section of the population mainly with a view to build up a self-reliant community in which the economically and socially depressed people are capable of taking their place as equal partner of the society. The Samity has been carrying on some development programme through local collection of subscription in cash and kind. The activities of the adjacent projects of Kadambagachi, Kirtipur and Noapara have induced the Samity to approach the Rural Development Consortium for financial help. The Executive Committee of the R.D.C. sanctioned a Small Project at an estimated expenditure of Rs.24,000/- - Rs.14,000/- from the project fund and balance of Rs.10,000/- being the Peoples' Contribution.

The Small Project made provision for distribution of Cycle Vans and Rickshaws, goats, poultry birds, small loans etc. to the landless families. 181 landless and poor families have so far been benefitted by the Small Project. Necessary Peoples' Contribution in the form of Bank loans as estimated in the Small Projects has duly been availed of. Repayment of loans for Rickshaws and Vans as well as of Small loans has so far been satisfactory and the Bank is satisfied with the activities of the Samity. There are good number of enthusiastic youngmen who are taking active part in the development works. Since however the fund provided by the small project and also the contribution collected locally in cash/kind is a meagre one the Samity's activities have so far been restricted to helping the poor cultivating families in getting input loans, distributing rickshaws and vans with respective share for peoples' contribution as Bank loan, distributing goats and poultry birds as well as some small loans to the landless and marginal farmers. The major portion of the target population is wholly dependent on agriculture either as marginal and small farmers and/or agricultural labourers. The cultivated area is monocropped for want of any irrigation facility though the area is potential for development of underground water resources. The beneficiaries are very poor with very small holdings and it is not possible for any individual to get his own shallow tubewell for obvious reason. Community sinking of shallow tubewells is considered to be the only way of providing irrigation for developing agricultural potential. The project holder could not however make any headway for lack of funds. There is also scope for subsidiary income for the landless category and very poor marginal farmer families through live-stock farming, village and cottage industries, small trades etc. All these require some supporting fund besides Bank loan. The Society has accordingly approached Rural Development Consortium for financial assistance.

3. Contents & Aim of the Project : The Project consists of an overall area development programme covering eight villages of Gatitha and seven other contiguous villages as indicated in table 3.1. below within Barasat P.S. of 24-Parganas district. Total geographical area, cultivable area and area not available for cultivation are indicated below :-

a)	Cultivated field cropped area	740 acres
b)	Plantation cropped area(Fruit trees)	380 "
c)	Area not available for cultivation	521 "
	Total geographical area - -	1641 acres

ii) Since most of the field cropped areas indicated in (a) above are owned by the weaker section families of the marginal and small farmers, the proposal envisages development of the said area by providing irrigation facilities besides creating opportunities for subsidiary income for the landless agricultural and other working families in general. The land situation, soil condition, general topography, annual rainfall and other general physical and economic condition are similar to those existing in adjacent project areas of Kirtipur, Kadambagachi and Noapara with equal potentialities for tapping ground water to make irrigation water available. While the irrigation facilities will be concentrated in the lands of the small and marginal farmers, some land of more affluent farmers will also have to be covered in the group irrigation scheme. At the instance of the Project Holder, the affluent have agreed to bear their respective share of loans with their informal share croppers.

iii) The situation of cultivable land consists mainly of three general categories as below :-

Upland	100 acres
Medium	250 acres
Medium low	380 acres
Low lying	10 acres
Total :	740 acres

Most of the present mono-cropped cultivable area of 740 acres is owned by the weaker section families of marginal and small farmers. Almost entire area can very conveniently be brought within the command of shallow tubewells thereby stepping up of agricultural production substantially by adopting improved cultural practices including introduction of multiple cropping.

iv) Of the total number of families of 843, 426 are landless agricultural and other labourer families, 241 are marginal and 51 are small farmer families while 125 families own more than five acres or less but otherwise well-to-do. Thus nearly 85% of the total number of families are economically depressed. Most of the landless and good many marginal farmer families of the poorest means hail from the minority community of the muslims, scheduled castes of Kaoras, Bagdis, muchis and other poorer families.

v) The following two tables will indicate the geographical area, cultivable area, population, category wise distribution of families with size of cultivable land holdings etc.

Table : 3.1.

.No.	Name of the village (Mouza) with J.L.No. in ( )	Geographical area in acres	Cultivable area including plantation cropped area in acres	popul-ation	Distribution of categories of families in No.				
					Land-less	Marg-inal	Sma-ll	Othe rs	Tot al
1.	Gotitha (69)	184	136	784	58	33	5	21	117
2.	Amradanga (70)	113	69	419	43	20	2	5	70
3.	Badu (71)	223	167	1252	93	65	19	22	199
4.	Kathore (72)	237	147	677	75	25	5	22	127
5.	Chandanhati (105)	157	102	326	27	13	4	11	55
6.	Nalkumra (104)	132	91	319	20	19	3	10	52
7.	Bishnupur ( )	165	97	582	47	28	5	11	91
8.	Maheswarpur (67)	430	291	832	63	38	8	23	432
	T o t a l :	1641	1120	5191	426	241	51	125	843
	Less land covered by plantation crops :-	~~820~~	380						
	Total cultivable land lying as monocropped for want of irrigation facilities.	~~5340~~	740						

Table : 3.2.

Categorywise distribution of families along with size of cultivating holdings :

tegories of families	No. of families	% on total number of families	Area possessed in acres	% of cultivable area possessed
Marginal farmer families				
i)Possessing land upto 1 acre -	141	16.7	122	16.5
i)Possessing land from 1.1 to 2.5 acres	100	11.9	213	28.8
Small farmer families possessing land from 2.5 to 5 acres -	51	6.1	185	25.0

Table : 3.2.

Categorywise distribution of families along with size of cultivating holdings :

Categories of families	No. of families	% on total number of families	Area possessed in acres	% of cultivable area possessed
B. F. :	292	34.7	520	70.3
Landless agricultural & other working families	426	50.5	-	-
Total weaker section families	718	85.2	520	70.3
Families possessing land above 5 acres &/or otherwise well-to-do though some of them may possess less than 5 or 2.5 acres or no land -	125	14.8	220	29.7
T o t a l :-	843	100.0	740	100.0

vi) It will be evident from above that the weaker section farming families of marginal farmers and small farmers occupying 34.7% of the total cultivating families possess as much as 70.3% of the cultivable lands while the affluent ones occupying 14.8% of the families own the balance of 29.7% of the cultivated lands- the landless category account for as much as 50.5% of the total number of families, many of whom do not even possess homestead lands. Thus the target group of landless working, marginal and small farmer families counts as much as 85% of the total number families whose economic condition is very deplorable.

vii) The main object of the proposal is to assist the landless agricultural and other landless labourer families by increasing employment opportunities and creating avenues for subsidiary income as also to extend irriga-

tion facilities to the weaker section cultivating families to step up agricultural production by adoption of improved cultural practices and introduction of multiple cropping pattern. Pending formulation of the detailed comprehensive area development programme as proposed by the project holder at the initial stage it will commence with a pilot phase on an estimated expenditure of Rs. Rs.2,36,350 as described itemwise in paragraph 4 and summed up in paragraph 5 below out of which Rs.1,19,850 has been provided in the project fund and balance of Rs.1,16,500 will be available as peoples' contribution. The detailed programme will be drawn up after a mid-term appraisal of the pilot phase.

4. Project details :

i) Provision for irrigation facilities by sinking shallow tubewells :-

As already indicated in the foregoing paragraphs the cultivable area is yet single-cropped with traditional monsoon paddy for want of any irrigation facilities. The area has very good potentiality for tapping ground water from within the depth between 80 - 125 feet - water level ranging between 10 - 20 feet round the year. In the pilot phase it is as such proposed to instal 9 (nine) shallow tubewells in cluster in contiguous area of Mathgachi math of Badu and Maheswarpur villages in order to enable the beneficiaries to bring the unirrigated sinle-cropped area of 50-60 acres (which is also the gross command at present) within the fold of multiple cropping pattern thereby increasing the command to a gross area of at least 90 - 100 acres during the year with the ultimate object of bringing entire unirrigated single-cropped are under the tubewell command in course of time. Since the high tension line is passing through the area, energisation of the tubewells thereby lowering down the running cost as well as water rate would be an advantage to the beneficiaries. Total estimated requirement for sinking

9 (nine) tubewells complete with pumps/motor with energisation cost, pump house etc. would be Rs.1,98,000 out of which Rs.54,000 will be the peoples' contribution and the balance of Rs.54,000 is provided in the project budget. The project fund will be kept as margin/guarantee money in fixed deposit at the nationalised Bank against which the Bank will advance the necessary fund and realise the money with interest by way of levy of water rate as per Bank's terms and conditions. By the time the Bank advance is completely recovered, the project fund kept in fixed deposit will be credited to the reserve fund of the project holder for utilising as revolving fund for sinking a greater number of tubewells as also for other developmental works in consultation with the sponsoring body.

It is, therefore, proposed to provide Rs.54,000 in the project fund so that balance of Rs.54,000 may be made available as peoples' contribution for implementation of this programme.

ii) Input Provisions - Crop Loan :

The nationalised Banks issue crop-loan no doubt but the benefit is generally enjoyed by the somewhat better-off cultivators. The marginal farmers of the poorest means in particular find it difficult to avail themselves of the opportunity after meeting necessary formalities. It is therefore proposed to keep a small deposit of Rs.5,000 in the pilot phase in the Bank as guarantee against providing loan for these farmers. The Bank will advance and realise accordingly entire amount required for cropping while the project fund kept as deposit will be ploughed back similarly in subsequent crop seasons.

iii) Live-Stock farming :

Of the 426 landless agricultural and other working families as also very poor marginal farmers 165 are members of the Scheduled Castes and most of the others are poor families of minority

community of muslims. These poor families are no doubt the headaches of the Society as their sources of income is only as day labour which is very limited. Inm order to provide sources of subsidiary income to these categories of families it is proposed to make provision for Bengal Black goats and poultry birds at the rate of 2 goats / 5 hens and improved cock per family for 75 families on an estimated expenditure of Rs.10,000 in consideration that maintenance of these will not put up any financial burden on the poorest recepient families as all these usually graze and feed by themselves. Necessary terms and conditions in this regard are that each recepient will return one three month's old she-kid per goat received / one three month's old pullet per hen received to the project hold for subsequent distribution to other non-recepient families of the same category.

It is accordingly proposed to provide Rs.10,000 for the pilot phase of the programme for distribution of goats and poultry birds.

iv) Tailoring programme for Sewing, embroidary and wool knitting :

A number of women mostly hailing from poorer families have already taken training in sewing and embroidary but their economic condition does not permit them to have their own machines or the working capital. They are not even in position to place margin / guarantee money for availing of Bank facilities. It is proposed to provide margin/guarantee money to be kept in fixed deposit against which the Bank will advance entire expenditure for the purpose. The Bank in its turn will realise the amount of loan towards cost of machine and working capital advanced so that the margin/gurantee money is recycled. Necessary requirement for 10 units for sewing, embroidary and wool knitting provisions with working capital in the pilot phase will be Rs.32,000/- out of which the project fund provides Rs.8,000/- as

margin/gurantee money while the entire expenditure of Rs.32,000/- will be made available as peoples' centribution through Bank Loan. By the time the Bank advance is recouped, the project provision will be rolled back for the same purpose.

v) Distribution of Cycle Rickshaws and Cycle Vans :

There is only one Bus service to Calcutta through the main highway but is very irregular. Rickshaws and Vans are practically the only transport not only in the interiers, even on the main roads for movement of commodities as also passengers to the subdivisional headquarters, other bus points about 7 km. away, local weekly hats, hospitals etc. In order to give employment to the young man of the poor family, it is proposed to distribute 15 Rickshaws and Vans to 15 youths of the poor landless families. The project fund will provide the margin/gurantee money which will be kept in Bank in fixed deposit against which the Bank will advance total cost of the Rickshaws and Vans under usual terms and conditions. After realisation of the advances the margin/gurantee money will be credited to the reserve fund of the project holder for recycling. The monthly income out of each vehicle will be about Rs.400/- and after meeting necessary maintenance cost and family maintenance it will not be difficult for each recipiant to repay about Rs.100/- per month against loan. It is accordingly proposed to provide Rs.3000 for this item of the programme to be place at the Bank to facilitate the Bank to advance entire requirement of Rs.16,500 under the usual terms and conditions.

vi) Financial advance to the weaker section families engaged in home industries and small trades :

Among the target population there are good number of families who try to earn their living through cottage industries like busket making mat making, carpentry, smithy etc., purchase and sale of vegetables and other garden products, paddy husking by women and the like. Usually they take small loans from the money lenders at high rate of interest and so most of their earnings are consumed by the money lenders. In order to save these familie from the clutches of the money lenders, it is propose to provide in the pilot phase a sum of Rs.4,000/- for advancing as small loans usually not exceeding Rs.250/- per head subject to be realised with 4% service charge in suitable instalments. The intensio of the programme is to make the beneficiaries self-reliant by creating their own capital in course of time to carry on their business without any outside help.

vii) Provision of Fishing Nets, containers etc. :

Among the landless labourer families there are some families who are by profession fishermen labourers. The owners of the tanks engage these labourers for cleaning the tanks, netting and such other works required for pisciculture. Usually these labourers take nets on hire at higher rates from other people. It is therefore proposed to provide some fund for distributing nets, containers etc. to this category of labourers on hire purchase basis at the rate fixed by the project holder on no loss no profit basis. The hire charges realised will be kept in the reserve fund for repair and replacement of nets and containers A sum of Rs.2,500/- has been provided as the requirement of the pilot phase as grant for this programme.

viii) Training including adult education as well as non-formal training for children :-

It is necessary to train youths both males and females in organisational activities besides operation of pumps, plant protection equiptments, health and sanitation, poultry etc., The children of the landless families cannot go to conventional Schools during day as they have to work for their living. Not only the children even most of the adults do not know reading and writing in local language. In this phase it is proposed to set up one non-formal school for teaching both adults as well as non-school going children of these families. Necessary provision under this programme would be Rs.9,000/- as indicated below :-

	Pilot Phase
a) Training of Organisers & Operators.	Rs. 3,000.00
b) Non-formal education	Rs. 6,000.00
T o t a l - -	Rs. 9,000.00

Entire amount is proposed to be provided as grant.

ix) Establishment & Contingencies :-

For proper implementation of the programme in the Pilot phase also it will be necessa to provide two Organisers for a period of one year and two tube-well Operators and one Tailoring Trainer - cum - Cutting Master for a period of six months. The total estimated cost for maintenance of these staff and towards contingencies will come to Rs.20,000 as indicated below :

i) Staff - Rs. 14,000/-

ii) Contingency - Rs. 6,000/-

Rs. 20,000/-

5. Requirement of fund for the Pilot project :

The total likely expenditure for the pilot phase as per programmewise details indicated above will be Rs.2,34@,310 out of which Rs.1,17,810 has been proposed to be provided in the Project Fund and balance of Rs.1,16,500/- will be available as peoples' contribution as summed up below :-

.No.	Programme of work	Unit	Project fund Rs.	Peoples' contribution Rs.	Total requirement Rs.
1.	Provision for irrigation facilities by installation of Shallow tube-wells	9	54,000	54,000	1,08,000
2.	Input Provision	50 acres	5,000	25,000	30,000
3.	Livestock farming i) Goatery ii) Poultry	45 families 30 "	10,000	-	10,000
4.	Tailoring Programme for Sewing, Embroidary, Wool-knitting by the females.	10 Machines	8,000	24,000	32,000
5.	Distribution of Cycle Rickshaws and Vans	15	3,000	13,500	16,500
6.	Provision for Small Loans to Small Traders and those engaged in home industries.	20 - 25 families	4,000	-	4,000
7.	Provision for fishing Nets, Containers etc.	10 families	2,500	-	2,500
8.	Training		9,000	-	9,000
9.	Establishment and Contingencies.	22	20,000	-	20,000
	T O T A L		1,15,500	1,16,500	2,32,000
	Add 2% Donation to the R.D.C.		2,310	-	2,310
	Total Requirement for the Pilot Phase.		1,17,810	1,16,500	2,34,310

Out of the total estimated expenditure of Rs.2,34,310 for the Pilot Phase it is proposed to provide Rs.1,17,810/- in the Project Fund to facilitat undertaking of larger programme in due course.

Appendix 6.1b (pages 283-287)

Project appraisal for irrigation scheme by the Rural Development Consortium, 19th April 1985

An Appraisal Report of Project No. P-7115 Area Development Project for Assistance landless labourers and Marginal Farmar in eight villages of Barasat P.S. for the period from 1.7.81 to 31.12.84.

Project Holder : - Udayan Samaj Kalyan Samity
Vill : Katore
P.O. : Badu
Dist. : 24-Parganas.

Udayan Samaj Kalyan Samity started its activities with the ultimate object of helping the poorer families. Their initial effort for development programmes was effected through collection of local contribution in cash and kind. Subsequently at the instance of R.D.C., the samity was provided with a small project at an estimated expenditure of Rs. 24,000/-. Out of which Rs. 14,000/- was to be made available as project fund, balance of Rs. 10,000/- being the people's contribution, in July, 1979. On being satisfied with the implementation of the small project, a pilot project amounting to Rs. 2,34,310/- was sanctioned by B.F.W., with a total project contribution of Rs. 1,17,810 , balance being met as the people's contribution. Entire project provision was secured in two instalments Rs.55,000/- in July 1981 and Rs. 62,810 in November 1983. Besides a sum of Rs. 3,17,142 was made available from U.Co., Bank Badu Branch as people's contribution. Several team from R.D.C., visited the project area and found that works were properly done. The implementation of the project appeared to be satisfactory as would reveal from the appraisal report of Miss Dolly Pal, Evaluation Officer, dated January, 1983. To assess the activities of the project I visited the project area on 31.3.85. The Secretary of the Samity Sri Asgarali and Treasurer Sri Basudev Chatterjee attended my visit. A glance in the enclosed statement of accounts would indicate that a sum of Rs. 1,27,577.70 has so far been utilised inclusive of revolving fund created, Bank interest and Rs. 65,000/- kept in F.D.R., as gurantee money. It may be noted that the Project Holder has only Rs. 323.56 as cash balance.

A statement of itemwise sanctioned amount, amount spent, realisation and numbers of beneficiaries are given in attached statement.

The report based on physical verification is given below as per information collected on spot verification.

(1) Development of Irrigation facilities by installation of shallow Tubewells :

Though initially there was provision of 9 shallow tubewells in cluster, the Samity with the assistance of the Block Panchayet Samity and local Bank

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has just installed 14 Shallow Tubewells complete in all respects with pump houses, energisation etc. in Badu and adjoining villages. Total assistance was Rs. 1,96,000/- the entire amount of which was advanced by the Bankers, peoples contribution subject to adjust 50% received as DRDA subsidy through the Panchay Samity while remaining 50% was to be treated as loan under Bank rules in vogue for which an amount of Rs. 50,000 was kept in F.D.R. as guarantee money as per terms with the Bank. Thus an amount of Rs. 2,49,520/- was the total involvement as under Bank loan

Bank Loan	Rs.	98,000
DRDA Subsidy	Rs.	98,000
Guarantee Money	Rs.	50,000
Contingent Expenditure	Rs.	3,520
	Rs.	2,49,520

Approximate command under these shallow tubewells will be to the tune of about 80 acres of cultivable land per year. It may be noted in this connectio that though the W.B.S.E.B. till the date of visit could not provide ~~current~~ electricity, many of the cultivators took advantages of the Shallow Tubewells drawing with diesel driven pumps and about 50 acres of land have been irrigated for cultivation of wheat, oilseeds and pulses, H.Y.V. Paddy, and vegetables. In all 90 families have been benefitted.

(2) Input Provision :

At the instance of the samity the local Bank advanced a sum of Rs. 80,400/- as crop loan to 125 families out of which Rs. 50,000/- ~~and~~ have already been released. No project fund was utilised for this purpose.

(3) Live-Stock Provision :

22 Bengal She-goats, 116 Ducks and 6 plough Bullocks were supplied at a cost ~~of~~ Rs. 9,806.40 among 22 landless, 58 Marginal and 3 ~~small very poor~~ marginal farmer families.

Auditors comments in this regard was verified. The Secretary of the samity informed that they purchased most of the live-stock locally by bargaining in view of comperatively much cheaper rate than that of any market or live-stock firm as a result of which it was not considered to obtain quotations. The vouchers were all stamped. The procedure was adopted with the approval of the Executive Committee. The secretary

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Executive Committee. The Secretary however informed that they have discussed with auditors already and also take note for future guidance. In any case the programme received good response as each beneficiary availed benefit of Rs. 50/- to 100/- per month out of the programme.

(4) Tailoring Programme :

A sum of Rs. 16,086/- was made available against a fixed deposit of Rs. 15,000/- and a cash credit account of Rs. 300/- to purchase 15 sewing machines. Total amount spent being Rs. 30,386/- out of which Rs. 9,586/- has so far been realised. 13 machines have been supplied to 13 poor women and 2 machines have been kept under the custody of the samity for training purpose. Loans are operating machines by securing order through the samity.

(5) Cycle Van & Rickshaw :

7 cycle vans and one Rickshaw have been supplied through Bank to 8 poor youths at an expenditure of Rs. 8,156/- , out of which 5,500/- has already been realised.

(6) Small Loans :

The samity advanced Rs. 7024/- as small loans like tea stall, vegetable vendering, hawkary etc. to 29 poor families. A sum of Rs. 2930.76 has been realised so far. The realisation appeared to be poor. The secretary was requested to see that the loans are realised and recycled for others of similar categories.

(7) Retail Trade Loan :

On recommendation of the society Bank advanced Rs. 16,500/- to poor families for cycle repairing shop, cock coal business etc. Out of Rs. 16,500/- an amount of 8,500/- has so far been realised.

(8) Fishing Nets :

A sum of Rs. 4,500/- has been advanced to purchase fishing nets to u poor fisherman families, out of which Rs. 2,500/- has already been realised.

(9) Training :

11 youths have received training in different discipline like orientation, health and non-formal education. A sum of Rs. 2,371.50 ~~2,840.05~~ has been spent so far. Trained youths have already been involved in the project activities.

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(10) Non-Formal Education :

2 N.F.E. schools were functioning in the two villages of the project area. 190 non-school going children of the age group of 8 - 14 years took primary education. 44 teachers are engaged for teaching purpose. A sum of Rs. 3,840,05 was spent so far. At present the programme has been kept suspended for short of fund. The programme received very good responses even some of adult also took part in the course.

(11) Establishment & Contingency :

As against a provision of Rs. 20,000/- an expenditure of Rs. 28,906.25 was incurred for T.A., conveyance and allowance to staff.

The expenditure appears to be higher. The secretary informed that additional expenditure could not be avoided due to continuation of the project for 3 years instead of one year for obvious reasons.

(12) Donation to R.D.C. :

A sum of Rs. 2,310/- has been paid to R.D.C. as donation.

Remarks:

It was evident from the performance that the project holder has created a good impact among the target group through different appropriate programmes as detailed above. The creation of irrigation facilities through Shallow tubewells besides others extended avenues for additional employment opportunities to the landless labourers in seasons when previously they could not get any work. The effort of the project holder to make available peoples contribution as Bank assistances and also Government subsidy as indicated above deserves special mention. The area was mono-cropped but now the beneficiaries have been able to raise more than one crop in the same piece of land obviously with irrigation facility made available. It was however seen that the project had been progressing comparatively slow at the later stage as it took time to meet formalities for availing Government subsidy through the Panchayet. Inspite of that the performance so far was found to be satisfactory. The secretary of the samity was requested to complete the audit up to 1984 and furnish the same to R.D.C. and B.F.W. without any further dealy.

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In the end, it is to state that the pilot phase could cover hardly few of the target population. There is even large area lack in irrigation facilities though the ground water position is quite congenial for installation of number of tubewells. It was gathered that the Block Panchayet Samity assures all assistances as and when required.

The project holder in its turn also at the cost of the pilot project acquired sufficient experience in rural development work thereby bringing the poorer families closer as would reveal from their work done on community basis. The project holder thus appears to be in position to take up larger programmes. It is therefore suggested that a larger project with appropriate programmes should now be taken up.

Ram Prasad Maity

RAM PRASAD MAITY
Investigator
R.D.C.
19.4.85

Appendix 6.2
Land redistribution in the Midnapore case study villages

A6.2.1 Land re-distribution in West Bengal

Chapter four discussed land reforms in West Bengal, and noted that disproportionate academic attention had been devoted to *Operation Barga* , while subjects such as minimum wage enforcement had not received adequate attention. The same can be said for re-distribution of land in the state, which will be discussed in this Appendix. This will continue the analysis of how resources are mediated by power in the case study villages, and allow for comparison with the findings from Fonogram.

As noted in chapter four, the redistribution of land owned by families with more than the maximum allowed and 'vested' in the government, was one of the policies central to the Government of West Bengal's reform programme. To recap, the declared policy of the government was (Government of West Bengal 1986: 2-3):

> ....to reduce, as far as possible the disparity and irregularities in the rural economic structure by bringing about a change in the ownership of land.... With this end in view a comprehensive multipurpose programme has been undertaken to distribute surplus lands among the landless.... The objective of the present government is to vest as much as permissible surplus land above ceiling in the State within the existing legal framework. ....The help of the Panchayat is also sought to search out surplus land above ceiling.
>
> Regarding distribution of vested lands Government's policy is to distribute at least a fraction of land to each landless (sic) enabling him to become self reliant ....up to 31st December 1985, 8.13 lakh acre vested land has been redistributed among 16.40 lakh peasants. Special mention may be made of the fact that 55% among them belong to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes community.

Two issues therefore make an evaluation of distribution of land relevant to this thesis. Firstly, it is a rural development programme aimed specifically at the landless, into which category many of the poorest are likely to fall. Secondly, it aims to include a high percentage of scheduled caste and tribe households; the Midnapore study villages were also selected partly because their scheduled tribe and caste populations were likely to be among the poorest in the state.

In theory, land reform in West Bengal is the responsibility of the *panchayat samity* , the block level middle tier between village and district levels (Kohli 1987: 112). In practice in the Midnapore study villages decisions as to which land was to be redistributed and who was to receive it appeared to be decided at village level by the *panchayat* chairman. The *panchayat* chairman under whose jurisdiction Bithigram and Keshipur fell had only

recently been elected, in 1988. He came from a wealthy household from a village about 4 kms from Bithigram. I interviewed him twice, once in his home, and once in his 'office' in Bithigram. This office was a small room in the house of the wealthiest Bithigram household, whose head had been *panchayat* chairman before the present incumbent, further evidence of control of *panchayats* by the powerful. The present chairman did not yet appear to have a good grasp of his duties, perhaps because of his newness in the post. One of his methods of selection of beneficiaries for government programmes became clear during the interview in his office when discussing the various schemes that the *panchayats* were undertaking. When he came to IRDP he turned to an acquaintance (who did not appear to be poor) who was waiting to do business with the chairman, and told him that he was the right sort of person to be taking out an IRDP loan. This approach seemed to be taken partly out of the exasperation of trying to meet a 'quota' and not having sufficient time to make a more considered choice of beneficiary, for the *panchayat* chairman had many duties to fulfil.

The land reform programme in West Bengal does not appear to have been sufficiently evaluated to allow general comments on its performance. Studies that have been carried out show mixed results. Redistribution is discussed in the14 village study from throughout West Bengal by Bandyopadyay (1983: 50-83), where the programme is accorded moderate success. Kohli (1987: 123) mentions the Left Front Government's 'cautious' approach to redistribution, but does not discuss it in any detail. Westergaard, from a four village study throughout West Bengal, including one village in the south east of Midnapore, concluded that: '....if we look at data on land distribution in the four villages, this land reform has been insignificant.' (1985: 81). Bose and Bhadoria's study of 40 villages throughout Midnapore District commented that (1987: 32):

> The state government's vigourous pursuit of targets of vested land distributions seems to have been very effective because this item has proved itself to be the most important factor (among all forms of government support) in generating additional income, particularly for the poorer strata.

The same authors conclude however (ibid.: 74): 'The class and caste wise distribution of aids (i.e. government support) also reveal a tendency to concentrate more on the articulate sections.' To these partial views of redistribution I now add an analysis of how far the government has met its aims.

A6.2.2 Land redistribution in the Midnapore case study villages

The geography of single cropped, semi-laterite central Midnapore was described in chapters four and five, and presents a very different landscape from the double cropped,

fertile, and alluvial area in north 24 Parganas. As outlined in chapter five, land operated by Bithigram and Keshipur households was divided between about half *danga* (or high land) and half *sali* (or lower*aman* paddy land). This was significant for the land redistribution programme in the villages, as relatively large quantities of the lower quality *danga* land, used for grazing livestock and *aus* paddy, were available for redistribution in the area. Another local political feature was the existence of *zamindars* , some of whose houses, by popular account, were destroyed during the 'land grab' period in 1967-69 when the Left Front were first elected in West Bengal (see chapter seven for more details). *Zamindari* land would therefore have been available for redistribution, but as these absentee landlords were still powerful locally in 1988-89, and hired out their land to villagers in villages near to Bithigram, the land that they gave up to the government would most likely have been *danga* land.

As part of the first round survey, household members in the two villages were asked if they had received any *patta* land (or land redistributed under the land reform programme), how much, and the type of land they had received. The following analysis is therefore based on respondents replies and is not as accurate as the findings on land operation in Fonogram. Nevertheless, the discussion below does give an indication as to which groups have benefitted from this government programme.

Bithigram respondents reported receiving some 26 hectares of *patta* land, or 30% of land operated in the village, while in Keshipur the figure received was a more modest 18% of village land operated, or eight and a half hectares. These figures can be compared to the 6 hectares received on average by each of 40 villages in Bose and Bhadoria's Midnapore study (1987:28); the Bithigram figure in particular is much higher.

Two reasons for this large size of redistribution - the large amount of *danga* land in the area and the large holdings of former local *zamindars* - have been mentioned above. The Keshipur *panchayat* member estimated that 6 hectares had been received in his village from the land of one *zamindari* estate, and that a further 4-5 hectares remained to be distributed. Bithigram households may also have received more land because the former *panchayat* chairman lived in their village and was influential locally. Also, households may have counted as *patta* land land which they had operated in the past but to which they had no formal right. Respondents reported taking land before receiving *patta* , but with the consent of the *panchayat* chairman, by *dockol* (or right to hold or possess), which presumably meant that in some cases they had unestablished use rights to the land previously.

The large amount of *danga* land available locally is shown by the type of land households received and the use they made of it. This is given in Table A6.1 for Bithigram and Table A6.2 for Keshipur. Only land listed under '*aman* farming' in the Tables was better quality *sali* land; the rest was *danga* .

Table A6.1 *Patta* land received in Bithigram up to 1988-89 by income group (decimals), and use of land

Income group	*Aman* farming(1)	*Aus* farming	Under trees	Not in use	Total
1	141 (19)	155 (19)	495 (16)	487 (27)	1278 (20)
2	333 (44)	452 (53)	1299 (42)	704 (39)	2788 (43)
3	124 (16)	238 (28)	337 (11)	176 (10)	875 (13)
4	156 (21)	-	979 (31)	448 (24)	1583 (24)
Total(2)	754 (12)	845 (13)	3110 (48)	1815 (27)	6524 (100)

(1) Figures in brackets for the first four rows give rounded percentages of the amount of land received by each income group.
(2) Figures in brackets for the fifth row give rounded percentages of the amount of land under each type of land use.

Table A6.2 *Patta* land received in Keshipur up to 1988-89 by income group (decimals), and use of land

Income group	*Aman* farming(1)	*Aus* farming	Under trees	Not in use	Total
1	-	109 (24)	167 (15)	193 (35)	469 (22)
2	-	100 (21)	212 (20)	361 (65)	673 (32)
3	-	200 (42)	153 (14)	-	353 (17)
4	-	62 (13)	546 (51)	-	608 (29)
Total(2)	-	471 (23)	1078 (51)	554 (26)	2103 (100)

(1)Figures in brackets for the first four rows give rounded percentages of the amount of land received by each income group.
(2)Figures in brackets for the fifth row give rounded percentages of the amount of land under each type of land use.

The two Tables show that the quality of the land received overall was poor. In Bithigram 11% of land was better quality *sali* land (farmed under *aman* paddy), the rest being *danga*, while no land received in Keshipur was *sali* .

The uses to which the land was put shows that in many cases only reduced benefits would accrue to its owners. Eighteen per cent of total land in Bithigram and 26% in Keshipur was not in use, either because of the inability of the household which had received the land to cultivate it, the poor quality of its soil, or the distance of the plot from the village. In Bithigram 66% of this land belonged to groups 1 and 2, and in Keshipur all of the land in this category belonged to the same two groups. Yield from land under trees (i.e. eucalyptus, see chapter five) might be of high value, dependent on the market price of eucalyptus. However, about half of the land under eucalyptus owned by income groups 1 and 2 in Bithigram was being rented out to a company called Palport, which planted the trees, guarded them and would give the landowner 50% of yield after 14 years. In Keshipur it was mainly the upper two income group households that had planted trees.[1] Equally, land under *aus* was likely to be planted only every consecutive year, and to produce poor yields.

Value of the redistributed land was thus generally low, and this partly accounts for its large quantity in relation to total land operated by the village households. Even so, benefits from this programme were spread more evenly across the income groups than those from the irrigation scheme in Fonogram. Income groups 1 and 2 received 63% of total land in Bithigram and 54% in Keshipur. These two income groups in Bithigram received some 63% of *aman* land redistributed, and 72% of *aus* land. However, it is only in comparison with the Fonogram irrigation scheme that this programme seems impressive. The land redistribution was targetted specifically at the landpoor, and scheduled castes and tribes (found in groups 1 and 2 in the villages), so that a relatively large percentage of benefits had 'trickled up' to the wealthier income groups.

One further point needs to be made concerning this programme. Poorer households receiving land did not just consider the material benefits it might bring. Some viewed their receipt of low quality *danga* land which they could not cultivate with a certain amusement. As one tribal woman from Bithigram put it: 'The government has given me stony land on which nothing will grow. So I will eat stones'. To others, particularly poor tribals in Bithigram, the land they received signified the possibility of escaping from dependency on

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[1]The *amount* of land under eucalyptus shown in the Tables hides the fact that on average the higher income groups planted more trees per *bigha* of land.

the wealthier families and moneylenders in the village, even though the quantities that poor households received were small. They could also produce paddy for their own consumption. Even 8 decimals of paddy land could be a significant amount for a poor household. Farmed intensively during the *aman* season, when the main input was household labour, households were reporting yields of 4-5 *maunds* of paddy (or 160-200 kgs.) from this amount of land, the equivalent of two full months of wages from agricultural labour. In comparison to the Fonogram programme, tribals in Bithigram receiving land did have a sense that the government was attempting to support them even if in a small way, which gave them a psychological boost.

The government's aim of distributing 'at least a fraction of land to each landless' household can be seen to have been almost met, particulary in Bithigram. The wider aim of reducing 'disparities and irregularities in the rural economic structure by bringing about a change in the ownership of land' was not met. The quantity of land distributed was high, but much of it was of poor quality, and either could not be cultivated or would produce limited benefits. The upper two income groups continued to dominate in terms of land operation, and, particularly in Keshipur, also to receive at least equal benefits from the redistribution programme as the two lower income groups. It was the more politically organized tribals (for details, see chapter seven) in Bithigram who were the main beneficiaries in Bithigram, although 37% of total land redistributed went to the higher two income groups in this village.

Appendix 7.1 Intra-household distribution of food in the case study villages.

Respondents in the study villages were asked who missed out or ate less when there was too little food, as well as the order in which the household members ate.[1] The findings from the three villages will be considered together because they were similar in nature and for convenience. Households have been divided into six different categories on the basis of the household composition, as the response to the questions was dependent on the make up of the household. While some respondents did give an answer as to who ate most within the household, most replied concerning the order of eating, and order therefore has to be taken as a proxy for quantity. In some cases respondents were obviously replying generally about the situation as they saw it in their village, and this has been taken into account below.

The categories used for analysis of the replies of the sixty respondents were:

A: Two parents with sons and daughters under 12	-25 cases
B: Two parents with one child or children of the same sex, under 12	-10 cases
C: Single mothers and children	-7 cases
D: Single fathers and children	-3 cases
E: Two parents with no children or children over 12	-6 cases
F: No reply or non-applicable	-9 cases[2]

To take these categories in turn, in A, making up almost half of the households replying, there was a clear pattern in terms of order of eating. In 23 of the households it was the children who ate first, followed by the father and then the mother. Among the children in these 23 households, in 6 cases children ate in order of youth, irrespective of sex; in 10 cases the children ate together, and in 7 cases boys ate before girls. There was therefore no universal case of discrimination against girls in order of eating (and by proxy, in terms of quantity). As one male Fonogram respondent put it, expressing a general opinion:

> We don't measure how much everyone eats. The kids will eat first and most, if there is too little they won't listen, they have to have enough to eat. The boy eats first because he is smallest - we have a younger girl who is breast-feeding but after she is weaned she will eat first. If there

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[1]The actual phrasing of the questions was: 'If there was only a very limited amount of food in your house so that there wasn't enough for everyone to eat, then who would miss out that day and let the others eat?' If there were boys and girls in the household an additional question was asked 'Who eats first between the girls and the boys?'

[2]Category F included five households containing single widows, and four households whose members did not reply.

> is only 200 grams of rice it will go to the kids in equal shares - this situation is quite common. Then the kids will go out and get some fallen fruit, or maybe a turnip from the fields.

This can be contrasted to the reply of a woman in Keshipur:

> My husband and I fast if there is too little food. The boys eat before the girls. When they grow up boys will work more and therefore need to eat more. Girls will get married and leave the house so eat less. They do housework, which is only light work.

The most obvious 'discrimination' in this category was against mothers, who always ate last and probably least. As one man in Fonogram put it:

> Boys and girls eat first, the ones who make the most noise eat first. Then the father eats, then, if there is anything else left, the mother eats.

This same pattern of the woman, and usually the woman doing the cooking, eating last and least was also clear in households in category E.

In category B six respondents said children would eat first, three that everyone received the same amount (relative to age), and one that the father ate first. Amongst the children, only one Keshipur respondent (a man) said that boys ate first as this was "the tradition in the village."

In single parent households (categories C and D) it was the parents who ate after their children in all cases. In four of the five cases with both girls and boys in the household, it was the younger child who ate first, irrespective of sex.

The main conclusion that can be drawn here is that in every household it was mothers who ate last and least, in favour of, firstly their children, and secondly their husbands. A similar pattern of eating by the poor has been noted by Dreze and Sen (1989), summarizing details from a number of studies in India and Africa, although there is little agreement from empirical studies as to the effects of discrimination against women (Harriss 1986). The rationale for the eating order put forward by several respondents was that men went out to work and therefore needed more food than women who (for the most part) stayed at home.[3] There was also a bias against girls in that they ate first only when smallest, as opposed to boys who ate first in 11 out of the

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[3]However, Abdullah and Wheeler (1988: 451) from a nutritional survey in a Bangladesh village found that : 'When the food supply becomes scarce, it appears that men eat less in relation to the rest of the family.' There may therefore be a divergence between perception and 'reality' in my findings.

51 cases irrespective of age. The effects of this patriachal practice were somewhat balanced by the fact that parents also took into consideration the age of their children when deciding how much to give them, as that it was possible to explain to older children that there was not enough food.

Appendix 7.2 Additional references to sharerearing of livestock

The Table gives brief details of references to the system of share-rearing of livestock in Asia and Africa.

Table A7.1 Sharerearing of livestock in Asia and Africa

Study	Place	Rearer in	Rearer out	Type of animal
Epstein (1983: 121)	Karnataka India	Poor h.hold	?	Sheep, goats
Hill (1986: 89)	South India	Poorer people	Rich men	Cows
Jodha (1986: 1180)	80 villages dry regions/ India	Poor h.holds	Rich h.holds	Sheep, goats
Dasgupta (1987: 110)	1 village/ Uttar Pradesh India	Poor h.holds	Cattle owners	Cattle
Heyer (1989: 37)	Tamil Nadu India	Agri-cultural labourers	?	Buffaloes, cattle
Blaikie *et al* (1979: 64)	77 h.holds W. central Nepal	Poor h.holds	Patrons	Livestock, oxen
Tura Institute (1981)	Thailand	Poor h.holds	Dev. project	Buffaloes
Grossman (1984: 160-3)	Highland Papua New Guinea	58% of h.holds raising pigs	Patrons	Pigs
Swift (1981: 86)	Mali	Poor pas-toralists	Rich h.holds	Livestock goats
Cashdan (1985: 462)	Botswana	Poor h.holds	Wealthy cattle owners	Cattle
White (1986: 24)	Mali	Poor h.holds	Richer h.holds	Cattle
Rahmato (1988: 16)	Ethiopia	Peasant h.hold	Peasant h.hold	Livestock